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LOVE THROUGH A WIDE-ANGLE LENS: A MYTHIC NARRATIVE AND
FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF THE REALITY COMPETITION DATING SHOW

MORE TO LOVE

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of Social Sciences

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Amy LeAnn Zsohar

June 2011

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Title: Love Through a Wide-Angle Lens: A Mythic Narrative and Feminist Critique of the Reality Competition Dating Show *More to Love*

Advisor: Dr. Bernadette Marie Calafell

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ABSTRACT

Obesity is on the rise in the United States and reality television has also risen to the charge of representing fatness. *More to Love* was the first reality competition dating show to afford fat women a chance at reality show love. The purpose of the study was to look at how fat women are portrayed on reality competition dating shows. The purpose of this study is to understand how the mythic narrative of love through a feminist lens informed by LeBesco, Bordo, Hill Collins, and hooks are in conversation with each other in *More to Love*. This study found that the women were written into a fairy tale where they were afforded no ownership in their story. The bachelor, Luke, and their fatness controlled their destinies and their “happily-ever-afters.” Their identity was portrayed through their fatness, gender, and sexual orientation over any other identifying markers. The relationships with Luke and with food were found to be the main relationships evident. The study found that the show is unsuccessful in normalizing fat women as equally afforded the myth of love as thin women. It proliferates the totalizing of the identity of fat while minimalizing any other identity.

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Chapter 1: Introduction:
Love Through the Mediated Lens

People judge appearances as though somewhere in their minds an ideal beauty of the human form exists, a form they would recognize if they saw it, though they do not expect they ever will. It exists in the imagination. –Etcoff 10

Oh I don't want her, you can have her, she's too fat for me. –Too Fat Polka

Introduction

As many young girls do, I spent my childhood planning my perfect life that fit within the parameters of being a girl. I had my wedding planned at the age of 16, had my children's names picked out by 12, and knew beyond a shadow of a doubt I would be married by 25. Yet, everywhere I looked I was told I wasn't enough for that dream. I wasn't pretty enough, smart enough or thin enough to achieve any of those milestones. I bought into the rhetoric. I believed what I was told. I conceded my own happiness to the rhetoric of idealism through media and my own family. I watched my mother fight with her weight and expend a ridiculous amount of energy trying to fit an ideal. Everywhere I looked it was images of thinness as beauty. I looked for a love story on TV or in the

movies where a large girl found love; she wasn't just the best friend. I latched on to movies like *Hairspray* and *Shag* as the large girls found love.

Beauty was defined for me through these representations. Not only were the women thin, they were also white. It wasn't just their thinness that defined beauty; it was also their whiteness. The intersections of the two define desirability. Women of color are as rare as fat women on television and in romantic roles. Fat women of any color are defeminized through the mammy figure, the angry women of color, or the buffoon (Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*). Femininity, as it relates to the body, is presented in this stick thin, white female form (Bordo). To have love available to you, you must fit this intersection of identity, otherwise the friend role is the only available role, according to mediated representations.

As I grew older, I accepted that I would always be cast in the friend role. As long as I believed the rhetoric, I would be the friend. I celebrated with Camryn Manheim as she won her Emmy and dedicated it to all the fat girls. I was enthusiastic when *The Biggest Loser* started on television. Finally people who looked like me were on television. However they were still the friend or in need of being saved. Romance didn't appear to be an option for fat women like me. When FOX announced their new reality competition dating show, *More to Love*, I got excited. Finally, I believed I was going to be represented in a show about love. I watched the show the first time with ice cream in hand excited about what I was about to see. What did I see? I saw women's weight and height on the screen, wondering what that had to do with love. I saw an inordinate amount of tears and heard the statement "this is my only hope" too many times to count. I found myself enraged at the pathetic representations of me.

In my rage, I began to question what mediated representations of fatness are defining as normal. Each day, the average U.S. American adult watches 2.8 hours of television a day (Bureau of Labor Statistics). This is roughly half of the amount of leisure time Americans utilize a day (Bureau of Labor Statistics). CNN reported in 2009 that Americans were watching 151 hours of television per month (Gandossy). Television plays an important role in American society, which leads to the question: what is television telling us about women, beauty and fatness?

Female Fatness on Television

Women's roles have been heteronormatized on television as the good wife, the secretary, the friend, and the teacher since its inception. Throughout the history of television, these roles were played out in almost every character and talk show. When fatness has been present, it has been in the background, as the friend or in roles of subservience. Nell Carter played her mammy role incredibly well on *Gimme a Break* where she served as a surrogate mother for four white children in the 1980s. Later, Roseanne Barr on the show *Roseanne* embodied the mammy in a white body as a blue-collar wife and mother of three children. Charlotte Rae on the *Facts of Life* furthered the white mammy as a housemother of four young boarding school children. Ricki Lake came on the scene with a talk show geared toward a younger audience where she celebrated her size while confronting bullies and sharing stories of young women's struggles. Oprah came on the scene as a larger than life icon addressing current events and popular culture, while taking the audience on her roller coaster ride of weight loss and gain. These women in character shows were placed in mother or mammy roles depending on how they were racialized or imbued with differing class statuses. The two

talk show hosts spent many hours of television addressing weight issues. In the 1990s fat women began to appear in more serious roles. Camryn Manheim amazed and inspired in her Emmy winning role as a tough, yet fair, lawyer on *The Practice*. Food Network introduced us to *Two Fat Ladies*, two British cooks, who while making jokes about the health factor, or lack thereof, of their food, cooked up delicious fare. Even the most popular show of the 1990s, *Friends*, took a stab at fattening Monica for flashbacks to the character's high school years. This show, watched by between 22.1 and 31.7 million viewers between the ages of 15 and 40 in its ten seasons, allowed the audience to experience the ridicule, taunting and teasing thin Monica received for her once fat self (newmusicandmore.tripod.com). During the 1990s, Rosie O'Donnell came on the scene with her own talk show. She demonstrated through her program that she would not let anything hold her back, especially her size. While doing her show, she went on Broadway as the Cat in *The Cat in the Hat*. She never once used her show as a platform to call attention to issues outside of the celebrities she was interviewing on the show. Another celebrity on talk shows was Star Jones of *The View*. She spoke about being comfortable in her skin, but then ended the millennium and her tenure on the show half the size she was when she started. It was rumored that she had gastric bypass surgery, though she never discussed it until an article in 2007 in *Glamour Magazine* where she admitted it was not diet and exercise as previously claimed, but surgery that caused her to drop 160 pounds.

In the 2000s, as the millennium shifted, so did the presence of fatness on television. Oprah was thin again; Rosie was off television, as was Star Jones. Shows like *The Biggest Loser* and *America's Next Top Model* started to fill our primetime slots.

Images of ideal beauty filled our screens. Competitions to lose the most weight were appearing; Kirstie Alley was featured on *Fat Actress* showing the trials of being fat in Hollywood, and weight loss ads were taking over commercials during primetime. Prior to this they were mostly on later at night. The message could be interpreted as “Down with the fat chicks.” In the middle of this attack on fatness, Mo’Nique, an African American comedienne actress brought us *Mo’Nique’s F.A.T. Chance*, which claimed that fat women are “fabulous and thick.” The fat female form was to be celebrated. This beauty contest crowned two women, both women of color and over 35. This show did celebrate the fat female form while also sending the message that fatness is acceptable in women of color, but not in all women. Since the first episode of *The Biggest Loser*, fat-based reality shows have popped up, all with the express purpose of getting rid of the ugliness known as fatness. In 2009, the tide appeared to be turning with the introduction of *More to Love*, *Dance your Ass Off* and *Drop Dead Diva*. Two of the shows offered the audience a chance to see fat women as real women, not just friends or people in need of weight loss, but as women with whom love is an option. In 2010, Jillian Michaels from *The Biggest Loser* introduced her show *Losing it with Jillian* where she went to homes to help families become more healthy not only in body, but also in emotions and mentality. 2010 also introduced the show *Huge*, on ABC Family, chronicling the life of an overweight teenage girl at fat camp. All fat fiction-based shows released in the past year star a fat female as the lead. Very little is being said about the weight of the men on these shows and none appearing to be overweight or unhealthy. With the exception of *More to Love*, all reality-based shows dealing with weight are weight loss shows.

Television is not just about the shows; it is also the commercial breaks. In a daring move of advertising, Lane Bryant, a plus-size clothing store, bought ad space for its lingerie line, Cacique. The space was purchased during *American Idol* and *Dancing with the Stars*. The networks, ABC and FOX, moved the ads to the later hour, which receives fewer ratings, stating that the ad was too provocative. The controversy began in April of 2010 when the two networks requested the ad be censored to be less provocative as the time slot was during the family hour (CBS News). Both FOX and ABC representatives spoke up saying they acted no differently than they do for Playtex or Victoria's Secret. Executives at FOX accused Lane Bryant of going for publicity instead of compromise. Representatives from Lane Bryant argued that the ad was no more revealing or provocative than ABC's *Desperate Housewives*, which airs during the family hour on Sunday evenings (ecanadanow.com). Lane Bryant in their blog *Inside Curve* posted

ABC and FOX have made the decision to define beauty for you by denying our new, groundbreaking Cacique commercial from airing freely on their networks.... Yes, these are the same networks that have scantily-clad housewives so desperate they seduce every man on the block – and don't forget Bart Simpson, who has shown us the moon more often than NASA – all in what they call 'family hour'."

Whether the controversy was a publicity stunt or not, it brought the topic of weight discrimination to morning talk shows, newspapers, and into water cooler conversations at work and in homes. Since the controversy began in April of 2010, the ad has been viewed on youtube.com almost 6 million times. The publicity appears to have been good for viewing, but Lane Bryant ended the quarter with 2% less revenue than 2009 (charmingshoppes.com). However, Lane Bryant backed its customers by speaking out. Even if it isn't reflected in the sales, it is reflected in the uproar.

Mediated representations of fatness on television are bringing specific messages into the homes of the American people. The messages are varied, yet they seem to have the same basic undertone: you are not as good or equal to thinner people on television. Television isn't the only media attacking fatness. In 2009, according to the Library of Congress, 387 books were published that had the word "diet" in the title. In July of 2010, it is 276 books and counting (loc.gov). It seems a struggle to walk down the magazine aisle without seeing a large headline announcing a new way to lose weight, an article on "healthy living" or an article for a new and better diet. On any given day, magazines offer you the secrets of celebrities' weight loss, the secret to rapid weight loss, an exercise regime promised to help you lose inches incredibly fast, next to articles on how to love yourself more to improve your ability to find a better mate. These magazines offer a juxtaposition of desirability, self-loathing, change and romance; continuing the narrative from television that fat is undesirable and to be loved you must fit an ideal.

The modeling world is slowly beginning to change its ideas of beauty to ban size zero and below models from catwalk shows. This shift will hopefully bring about some positive changes in the body image of women and what is healthy. Many argue that models' sizes are the reason for the rise in anorexia and bulimia (Klonick; Henry; MailOnline; CNN).

Musicians have tried to bring forth a different image with Sir Mix-a-lot's *Baby got back* and Greg Alan and the Hitchhikers' *Beer Gut*, yet both also bring forth a misogynist view of women and their bodies. One song hit iconic status, and has become a staple in hip-hop; the other barely made a blip on country music's radar. Both songs objectify and sexualize the women about whom they are singing. While both songs have

popularity and one has reached an iconic status, the songs that make in on the music charts and sustain define an ideal of love and beauty.

Art reflects life or life reflects art?

As Monica was teased and taunted on *Friends* and Jillian is yelling at people to lose weight on both *The Biggest Loser* and *Losing It with Jillian*, the teasing and taunting of overweight children has risen to new heights. Himes and Thompson found that the fat stigmatization commentary and fat humor directed toward the larger character, whether the character was present or not, were usually done by male characters toward female fat characters. This taunting and teasing is not exclusive to television characters. CBS News reported in May of 2004 that being overweight and obese were main causes of bullying in school systems. Quinlan, Hoy, and Costanza in a study on adolescents seeking treatment for being overweight found a direct correlation between teasing and being large. In this study of 97 adolescents seeking treatment, 70 were female and the majority was white and middle class. Lumeng et al. reported that no matter the socio-economic, race, gender, sex, social skills or academic achievement demographics, obese children were bullied more for weight than any of the aforementioned demographic markers. Frisen, Lunde, and Hwang, in their study of peer victimization in adolescents, found that girls reported more accounts of peer victimization than boys did for being overweight, while boys reported more accounts of victimization for being underweight. Boys were seen as weaker when thinner, while girls were seen as less attractive, according to self-reports. Janssen et al. bring forth data showing that not only do overweight and obese adolescents get teased more for their weight; they are also more prone to take on the role of the bully. In another study on adolescents and obesity, Eisenberg, Newmark-Sztainer and Story

show a correlation between being bullied over weight and low body satisfaction, low self-esteem, high depressive symptoms, and thinking about and attempting suicide. DeLeel et al. studied girls ages 9 and 10 for body image dissatisfaction and eating disturbances and found that 11% of the sample were in anorexic range and 35% to 38% of the girls selected Ideal Figures smaller than their Real Figures (772-773). Body image issues at such a young age seem to be an unhealthy start to a healthy relationship with food and the body. These studies showed no difference in racial or ethnic groups in the amount of teasing or self-reporting of unsatisfactory body image. Haff found that her participants reported a significant number of white female participants were using or have used weight control items while black females were not even looking into those items. These studies all called for a need for more training and awareness of the issues surrounding bullying and weight.

Media has been said to reflect life and life to reflect media. Whichever way the argument goes, the cycle of fat-hatred is standing strong on both sides. To better understand this phenomenon, this study will take a closer look at the reality-based competition dating show *More to Love*.

Introducing More to Love

On December 20, 1965, Chuck Baris and ABC-TV introduced a new game show called *The Dating Game* (tv.com). This show ran off and on for 40 years and introduced a space for single adults to meet. Since *The Dating Game*, dating reality competition shows have taken on a new life. In recent years, dating reality competition shows have been appearing on many channels. *The Bachelor* and *Bachelorette* are staples of ABC and have constant high ratings. FOX brought us *Joe Millionaire*. VH1 has become a hub for

dating shows such as *Flavor of Love*, *Rock of Love*, *I Love New York*, *Real Chance of Love* and many more. MTV brought bisexuality to the forefront on its *Shot at Love with Tila Tequila*. The most recent insurrection is *More to Love*, created for FOX television as a dating show for the “average” size woman.

According to the *More to Love* website on Fox.com, this show “follows one regular guy’s search for love among a group of real women determined to prove that love comes in all shapes and sizes” (para. 1). This show stars a 26-year-old bachelor who is 6’3” tall and weighs 330 pounds. Luke Conley, the bachelor, describes his ideal woman as “intelligent, passionate, down-to-earth, full-figured and comfortable in her own skin” (para. 2). Twenty women fight for Luke’s attention and love over the course of the 8-week show. As the website states, “This brawny prince is searching for one curvy Cinderella to take on the romantic adventure of a lifetime” (para. 4). The women range in age from 21-37 and have careers that scan from student to teacher, model to lawyer and rocket scientist (www.fox.com/moretolove). The show is sold as a reality competition dating show like all others with the twist of being “average people.”

Mike Fleiss, the creator of *The Bachelor*, brought forth this new dating reality competition show for “average” people. Fleiss states the goal of the show to be “a dating show that sends the right message about embracing and loving yourself no matter your shape or size” (Rocchio para. 4). The show’s creators appear noble in their goals based on what they say in their press releases. However, in an interview with *The Reporter*, Fleiss states, “There used to be an idea that people wouldn’t watch unattractive people on television. *Biggest Loser* proved that is absolutely incorrect. People want to watch relatable people” (Rocchio para. 27). Fleiss calls the show inspirational, while insulting

his stars. In one part of the interview, he goes so far as to state that beautiful is “stick thin girls” (para. 16). In the set up for the show, larger people are in many ways objectified for their size. Emme, the host and a prominent plus-size supermodel, celebrates the show calling it “a relationship show for the average guy” (Rocchio para. 5), while acknowledging that the ideal show “would represent all sizes” (Waggoner para. 23). Emme’s presence is one attempt at justifying the show as a celebration of women of size. *More to Love* averaged around 4 million viewers throughout its summer run (www.tvbytheratings.com). This is a rather small number in comparison to the 11.4 to 15.6 million viewers *The Bachelor* averages. The show received many criticisms during its run through online discussion boards and news articles. Waggoner posits that *More to Love* is potentially harmful to the battle for fat acceptance. One person interviewed by Waggoner claims that the show is “reinforcing the stereotype of [the] miserable, crying fat woman who hates herself” (para. 17). In the first episode, the contestants’ (bachelorettes) age, occupation, hometown, height and weight were put on the screen. Dating shows of the past felt no need to disclose height and weight. Luke Conley, the bachelor, goes so far as to quip in an interview that “maybe they just have wider angles on their cameras now so they can fit me on the screen” (Justin para. 6). The show’s star is contributing to the idea that fat isn’t normal rather it is abject.

To better understand the ideas of *More to Love*, this study will look at fatness scholarship and reality competition dating show scholarship through the lens of feminist theory and the mythic narrative of love. The purpose of this study is to interpret how beauty, fatness and the idea of romantic love are portrayed on television using the text of the sole season of *More to Love*, which aired the summer of 2009.

The study begins with a look at the literature that exists within fatness scholarship and reality television then transitions into a brief overview of the theory and method used for this study of feminist theory and the mythic narrative of love. For the purpose of this study, feminism will be studied looking at feminism and the body as well as through the lens of intersectionality. The method of narrative analysis will be examining the mythic narrative of love as seen in fairy tales. Joseph Campbell, Kenneth Burke, and Roland Barthes all inform my understanding of narrative. My analysis is a critique of the love-based fairy tale and questions who is afforded the fairy tale within the context of reality competition dating shows. The fairy tale will be deconstructed and reconstructed through the lens of fatness literature. The feminist analysis will offer a myriad of views of how the show portrays women, gendered performance, the fat female body, and the symbolism of femininity. The intersection of identities will also be examined exploring size as a marginalized identity. The study will conclude bringing these two together in a feminist analysis of the mythic narrative and how these interpret the mediated representation of fat females on television.

Chapter 2:

Love Through the Bifocal Lens of Literature: Fatness and Reality Television

Asked why people desire physical beauty, Aristotle said, ‘No one that is not blind could ask that question.’ –Etcoff 3

I’m tired of magazines, saying flat butts are the thing. –Sir Mix-a-lot

More to Love brings forth questions surrounding fatness, and its role in reality competition dating shows. In a time when “fat” is demonized and deemed unlovable (as evidenced in shows like *Heavy* or *I Used to Be Fat*), this show combines a juxtaposition of love and fat; two seemingly incommensurate elements: literature on both fatness and reality competition dating shows brings forth arguments for their power in society and their validity as an area of research.

Scholarship on Fatness

Discussions surrounding weight are prevalent in society. It is rare to find a talk show that isn’t addressing weight, see a women’s magazine without a headline for the latest workout craze or diet plan, watch a television show without a commercial for a diet plan or pill, or have a news magazine show go a month without discussing the harms of

fatness. The messages in most mediated communication, in this scholar's opinion, is that fat is altogether unhealthy, ugly, undesirable, and the one thing no one wants. These messages are geared mostly toward women, as men can get away with more girth than women can (Bordo). The never-ending images and discussions of body size have led to a rather extensive body of scholarly literature asking the question: is fat a feminist issue? Does fatness fall into the category of feminism?

To better understand the literature surrounding fatness, a clear definition of how the term will be used must be set. For the purposes of this study, fatness will be defined in part by using the American Medical Association and the Center for Disease Control's definition of overweight and obese. They define fat through overweight and obese by stating, both are "labels for ranges of weight that are greater than what is generally considered healthy for a given height." Fat, however, is more than a medical condition. It is also a power structure. The conflict of fat and thin puts one as the dominant power entity. In current US American society, thin is the preferred, therefore more powerful. Being fat has become part of a large political system. Fatness is blamed for many health issues, social stigmas, and oppression. Fatness is not just a size of the body, but a way of seeing and being seen. Bodies that are larger than the ideal are seen as unacceptable, and therefore, undesirable.

In 1978, Susie Orbach published *Fat is a Feminist Issue*. Within this text, she addresses body image and claims that her book is an anti-diet book. However, her book, and its successor *Fat is a Feminist Issue II*, continues the existing discussion of fat as bad. Throughout both books, women are told to work toward their ideal self by

acknowledging control over food. Controlling food gains control over the body and works toward your ideal body. While her books give the appearance of being pro self, they build on the ideology that fat is a negative in women. By removing the unwanted, negative fat, she tells her readers they will become more authentic and confident. Her book is not as much about self-acceptance as it is about self-control. She still continues to proliferate the “fat as bad” and “thin is beautiful” rhetoric. Her books did however help to open up a discussion on fatness as a feminist issue.

Orbach brought forth fatness as a feminist issue by demonstrating that feminism includes body image and size. Fatness has a much longer history in society. What was once considered a sign of wealth and affluence is now considered a sign of sloth and deviance (Fraser). American culture has a long history of colonizing the body and denying the flesh in the name of God (Fraser, 13). In this colonizing of the body, thinness has become next to Godliness. In the 1800s medicine stepped in with equations on what numbers constitute the perfect form (Fraser, 13). Since the 1800s, weight has been a popular topic in medicine to explain many illnesses including diabetes, heart disease, and cholesterol problems.

Levy-Navarro calls for a need to queer fat history so it can transition from an oppressive history to a transformative one. By re-evaluating the historical messages surrounding fatness, fatness can begin to be seen as a natural human state, not a grotesque evil. Queering fat history is way of taking the oppressive nature of the history of fatness and reclaiming it through reassigning the meanings of the words used to oppress. It also would offer a space to see fatness as a norm in the history of people, not as an evil fought

over centuries. As long as the history is an oppressive one, society will continue to degrade and marginalize fatness.

With fatness as both a historical and feminist issue, many scholars have contributed to the conversation surrounding fatness, body image, and feminist ideals. Mothers are being blamed for their children's weight to the point that some have been charged with child abuse and neglect (Boero 113-115). Mothers are judged on their ability to parent based on the size of their child. The judgments do not end with the mother. Bullying is on the rise for fat children in schools. Not only are they picked last in sports, they are taunted and teased (Weinstock and Krehbiel 121-122). The call is to start fat acceptance in schools to help the focus move from discrimination and bullying to societal acceptance (Ibid 124). Fat children are not just being bullied by other students; they also are being forced to sit in desks that are uniformly sized. The desks are set to a specific size that makes students fit in with a size norm (Hedrick and Attie). Students are being told that to fit in anywhere, one should be a small size. The discrimination continues in the college level where the desks are of equally small size. Airlines continue this regulation of size by charging extra for larger passengers. The bullying continues as the children grow into adults.

Fatness and Popular Culture

It is often said that art reflects life. If this is true, it makes sense that most scholars look toward popular culture and media as texts to critique the Othering of weight and the defeminizing of women who do not fit the mold that media represents. It is rare one can turn on the television and not see a critique of weight. Kathleen LeBesco, in her book

Revolting bodies?, proposes arguments on ways to normalize the fat body. Looking at popular cultural representations of fat women through print media, advertisements, television, internet discussion boards, and movies, she makes connections between commercialism and fashion availability for fat bodies, similarities between queerness and fatness, obesity as disability and rhetorically studies internet discussion boards that are pro-fat. She identifies three types of celebrity representations of fat, the out and about like Camryn Manheim and her “This is for all the fat girls” speech at the Emmys¹ (92); the silent types like Star Jones from *The View* and her unwillingness to openly discuss her weight (93); and the traitors like Roseanne Barr who speak out in support of fatness while having surgery to reduce the size of her stomach as a way to lose weight (94). Traitors only hurt the cause, many on which the traitors built their careers. Ricki Lake, Roseanne Barr, and Carnie Wilson all made comments early in their careers about being advocates for fat women until they made the choice to fit into the Hollywood ideal (Bernstein and St. John). When advocates turn their back on the group for which they are advocating, they are supporting the status quo and continuing the negativity of fatness. LeBesco challenges her readers to perform pro-fat rhetoric in attempts to remove the power of the word fat from a negative control to a positive word of strength. The current framings of fat are based in health problems, signs of laziness, sloth, and as a butt of jokes. LeBesco supports claims of fatness being the last approvable form of discrimination. This

¹ Camryn Manheim won her Emmy for her role on *The Practice*. In her acceptance speech, she raised her Emmy and proclaimed it to be dedicated to “all the fat girls.” In a profession where fatness is rarely seen much less celebrated, this moment was a landmark one for fatness in the media.

discrimination appears all over society. Oprah Winfrey is just one spotlight example of this discrimination.

Oprah Winfrey has spent her career fighting discrimination on the front of race and gender, yet contributes to the discrimination LeBesco describes against fatness. She has fluctuated up and down in size and has been very open to her public of her distaste for fat. Fisanick critiques this cultural icon of weight issues and how she handles overweight guests on her show. Winfrey makes claims that weight is a way of covering pain in life and once you find the root of the pain, one is able to then lose the weight. Fisanick questions this claim by spotlighting how Winfrey treats fat women. Winfrey has been criticized for ignoring fat guests, refusing to hug them, speaking in more condescending tones to them, and not making eye contact (Fisanick). Winfrey has held many shows and published multiple articles in her magazine attacking fatness; claiming that fatness must be punished through exercise and ostracizing the fat person. Cloud proposes the possibility that part of Winfrey's dislike for weight could go back to the archetype of the Mammy of Hollywood. Hill Collins defines the mammy as a black mother figure in white homes. Winfrey's presence on the TV and influence would be seen more as a Mammy if she stayed at the stereotypical mammy size of fat. In Winfrey's attempt to achieve the American Dream, Cloud posits that Winfrey is avoiding the Mammy image as well as embodying the ideals of the entrepreneurial success through control. In her strive for success, control is a goal and one must control their body to achieve the hegemonic goal of the American Dream. Oprah Winfrey is a leader among

the American people and is continuing the rhetoric of the evils of fatness, focuses her energy on fatness in women.

Weight loss stories of celebrities are not limited to Oprah Winfrey. Jessica Simpson has been called fat at a size eight. Similar claims were made against size six Jennifer Love Hewitt and Cheryl Burke of *Dancing with the Stars* at a size four for having large muscular thighs. The response to women is much quicker and harsher than men. For example, Al Roker of *The Today Show* had surgery to help him lose weight. Carnie Wilson of Wilson Philips had a similar surgery. The two were discussed in very different terms. Ferris and Langham (2005) put the two stories and their discussion side by side and found that Roker was celebrated for the selflessness of his surgery; as he did it for his family. Wilson was found selfish as she did it for herself. Much rhetoric surrounding weight loss is the statement of doing this for your health, yet when a woman makes that claim, she is found selfish. Wilson put herself and her image before others. While Roker was doing it for family, thereby being the selfless giver and provider, Wilson was doing it for herself and her career, not for a greater good. The two also had a great deal of differences in career. As Roker's weight increased, his career stayed strong, while Wilson's career faded as she gained weight (7). Gender roles played into the discussion surrounding the two surgeries. Women are to be selfless. Wilson doing the weight-loss surgery for herself removed femininity from her image with the press (11), while Roker was celebrated for his selflessness.

Popular culture has forgiven certain transgressions or manifestations of fatness. The large buttocks on women of color who are thin everywhere else is found acceptable,

even sexy as proven by Jennifer Lopez (Negron-Muntaner). However, this large buttocks is “extremely raced, hypersexualized and classified ‘other’” (Burns-Ardolino 279). In the racial sexualization and othering of the female form for the size of the buttocks is objectification and demoralization of women, especially women of color. Women of color are forgiven and, at the same time, celebrated for large buttocks in that it makes them objects of lust. Rivera, in her book *New York Ricans from the Hip Hop Zone*, demonstrates how pop culture, namely rap music, has proliferated the acceptability of sexualizing women of color through rap lyrics. The voluptuous curves of women of color become signs of their fertility, which is a sign of their sexuality. A fear is still present in this, the fear of sexuality.

The fear of fatness is driving shows like *Biggest Loser*, *Ruby*, *Dance Your Ass Off*, *Fat Friends*, and *Diet Tribe*. The media is sending many messages saying fat is to be feared, not accepted. Few to no messages say that fat women can be healthy, attractive women. Kyrola argues that fatness is a two-level closet: the closet of society that discriminates and the closet within the person that the body creates is shutting out the outside world and possibilities (99-100). These are closets of invisibility. Representations of fat women celebrating their size rarely occur on reality television. *Drop Dead Diva* on Lifetime Channel is working to celebrate women of size, yet the lead is a size 16, so still on the average side of women. Brown notes that average women acceptance is on the rise, yet still limiting to women beyond size 18. In most cases, when fat women are represented on television, they are the friends with a highly sexualized thin friend who use the fat friend as a “prop against which thinner women are compared, judged, and

valued” (Giovanelli and Ostertag 294). Fatness is used as a ploy on television to be a foil for the thin female character.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, in recent years, weight on television has been the source of new reality shows. *The Biggest Loser* and *Dance Your Ass Off* exploit fatness and use rhetoric of saving fat persons from themselves. Oliver argues “so-called reality television shows such as the *Biggest Loser* make fatness the central problem for the ‘contestants’ to overcome, quite untroubled by the derogatory pun in the programs’ title” (61). These shows portray trainers yelling at the participants, strictly regulating the diet, and in search of that source of pain Winfrey speaks of to find the root of the fat. Sender and Sullivan, in a study of responses to a survey on reality shows, found that the viewing audience to perceive the *Biggest Loser* as a show that is taking advantage of people with fat more than helping them. In the show’s history, a good majority has gained some, if not all, the weight back, according to multiple news sources. In Sender and Sullivan’s study, analysis found that the overarching claims by their survey participants bought into the rhetoric that fatness is a lack of will and an unwillingness to change. The themes of these weight loss shows are of the need for self-discipline and self-esteem to gain acceptance in society (582). The contestants themselves put forth the idea of societal needs for acceptance. In an examination of the contestants’ desire to be on *The Biggest Loser* in Australia, Murray found the women’s desires is based on the male heterosexual gaze of attractiveness (to fit in wedding dress, to be attractive) while the men wanted to lose weight for the people in their lives (my mom to not have to bury me, my kids to be proud) (91). Television weight loss shows instead of helping the

contestants lose weight are strengthening the rhetoric surrounding weight as the source of loneliness and unhappiness in not only its contestants, but also the viewing audience.

Fatness is not just seen on television. In recent years, fat women have been seen on the theatre stage as well. *Hairspray* has been touring around the country after a very successful run on Broadway and was made into a motion picture.² The lead, Tracy Turnblad, makes it in the world of television dance shows as a fat woman. She also manages to win the heart of the male lead. Jester studied five plays of the recent years to see what messages are being sent from the stage about fatness. While strides have been made in fat acceptance on the stage, four of the five shows ended with messages surrounding fat as okay, but thin is better (Jester). With the exception of *Hairspray*, the plays studied sell the idea that fat can survive, but to thrive one must be thinner.

In movies like *Shallow Hal* and *The Nutty Professor*, thin actors don fat suits in an effort of bringing about fat awareness. The directors and cast in particular set up these two films as movies that are positive for fat people (Mendoza 281). Mendoza posits that these two movies do more harm than good. In *Shallow Hal*, when the lead Rosemary is seen romantically, she is always the thin version of herself. While in the end, the lead male chooses Rosemary over thinner women, all romance occurs when she is thin. In *The Nutty Professor*, Sherman is almost stereotypical in his self-loathing, to the point that he creates a formula that makes him thin. In the end the fat person wins out and wins the

² *Hairspray* was originally created by John Waters for the screen, starring Ricki Lake in 1988. In 2002 it opened on Broadway changing the social commentary from people of color being in detention instead of special education. When the musical was turned into a movie in 2007, it continued this shift in the cultural message. The musical and movie were made more palatable by changing the message of color as lacking in intelligence to color as delinquent.

girl, but it is only after a long battle of self-loathing. The presence of the fat suit in both cases demonstrates a need in Hollywood to maintain an ideal with the ability to put fat on and off with ease. In some ways, the fat suit can be argued to be a contemporary version of blackface. Fat suits are rarely used for moments of drama, yet for comedic purposes. This comedy of the body maintains Hollywood's abject dislike of fatness and the ridiculousness with which it is seen.

Fatness and the Ideal

Within the studies of fatness, the question is analyzed about what is the ideal woman? In an attempt to define an idealized woman, one must look at weight. In today's popular culture representations, an idealized woman is thin, white, and upper middle class. McKinley attempts to question the construction of the ideal woman when what is idealized is thinness; fat women are accused of being prone to excess therefore making them less sexual or sexually deviant (106). The characteristics of the ideal woman of today require that she be feminine in thinking of herself after others, yet must be masculine in her independence. To be feminine is to make one's self as small as possible. Fat women pose a threat to this mentality, while historically larger women were seen as healthy and more capable of reproducing. Young continues this argument through studying the discourse of dieting. The discourses of dieting, especially in women's magazines, "advocate women as projects, narratives of deficiency, and lack" (251). The definition of femininity doesn't allow for weight. Young claims, "As long as thinness is valued more highly than fatness, and the negative connotations of fatness still exist, fat

women will never be accepted as women, regardless of fat” (251-252). Fatness is seen as masculinizing the person due to sheer size.

Women’s magazines are hot spots for weight discourse. It is very difficult to find a magazine that doesn’t address weight in every edition. In bridal magazines, thin women are seen as deserving in their photos. They are rarely looking at the camera or smiling. Larger women are seen as smiling and surprised to find themselves getting married (Patterson 244-245). This surprised face seems to make sense as “fat white women are far less likely to marry, report far fewer dating partners or dating experiences, and generally report fewer close friends than thin women” (Oliver 87). The undesirability of fatness is permeating magazines. Queen Latifah, an African American rapper and actress, was featured on the cover of the May 2004 edition of *Glamour*. *Glamour* was celebrating “regular women” with Queen Latifah in a dress that did not show off any of her curves. In a critique of this edition, Childress praises *Glamour* for its attempt and the article on Queen Latifah that does not frame her body as unhealthy. Her critique is of the article’s use of women as color as the acceptable larger women, while the white women interviewed in conjunction with this article were considerably thinner. Childress makes the argument that this edition of the magazine are further Othering fat white women.

Queerness and fatness are brought together in zines, small urban specialized publications, such as *Fat Girls* and *Queen Sized*. In her study of fat zines, Snider poses that the argument made by these zines is to “refuse the silence imposed on them from a society obsessed with keeping heterosexual and thin norms” (229). By redefining the definition of beautiful the editors of the zines resist erasure and humiliation.

In novels, fat girls are rarely seen as the heroine or love interest. Snider calls for more literature for fat women who celebrate their size, while Frater looks at the existing literature and the overwhelming themes of thin is better. Frater, in her study of six books that have fat female leads, only two were willing to push past the teens in size into the 20s. Almost every book ended with the lead losing weight to feel better about self. The two novels that included characters that didn't lose weight and didn't find happiness also do not end in acceptance of their size. Instead, characters than accepted more important things exist than self-image. These two storylines are reflections of the current pop culture representations of fatness in women.

Millman posits that fat women fall into two categories when it comes to relationships with men: over-sexualized women and "one of the boys." Fat women feel that to be a desirable woman they must become sexual early, turning towards older men who appreciate the curves of younger women, or befriend all the men in their lives removing sexuality from the equation (77). The "friendzone" becomes a safe place for fat women to have a relationship with men their own age.

In the bar scene, fat women are ignored, abused, or fetishized by the men in the space. Prohaska and Gailey studied a phenomenon called Hogging. Hogging is where men go out to bars with the sole purpose of locating and taking home the fattest or ugliest girl in the bar for sex (158). This not only demoralizes the women, it also puts doubt about any man in a bar that approaches a larger woman. Larger women are also more prone to abuse. As society demonstrates that fatness is an inherent evil, when a fat woman is abused in relationships, the woman is more likely to see no way out or no hope

for a future relationship (Royce). The friendzone appears a great deal safer than the dating scene with this kind of activity occurring.

Burlesque shows have worked towards opening up the attractiveness and sexual side of fatness. Asbill and McAllister have written about the tours they have done around the world celebrating fat sexy women. The purpose of these shows has been to show audiences that sexy does not have a size. These shows are not meant as objectification, but as liberation for women. Burlesque shows celebrate the woman, no matter the size, shape, or color.

Race and weight seem to go hand in hand. Fat women of color are more present on television than fat white women. Fat women of color are usually seen as maternal, such as the nanny, the housekeeper, rarely as romantic partners (Hill Collins; Shaw). Hill Collins argues that this desexualization or hypersexualization allows for the abuse and objectification of Black women's bodies. As with the Hottentot Woman, the raced body is seen as unexplainable and needing of colonizing (Gould; Fausto-Sterling). The normalizing of fat women of color is also maternalizing them. Fat white women are few and far between. In the summer of 2009, one show had a fat white female lead; no program had a fat female lead of color in fictional shows. Oliver noted, "On television, just as there is a particular bias against fat people in general, there is an even more specific bias against fat white women. Not only do fat white actresses have a harder time getting work (only about one in nine white female television actresses is overweight), but they are almost never cast in romantic roles" (79). The lack of fat women and people of color on television establish that for normalcy to exist it must be in thin white women.

Fat women in fictional shows of recent years have been scripted to have their bodies disciplined. Ruggerio studied the representation of fatness on HBO's *Carnivale*. The woman who was fat and celebrated her sexuality was murdered. The murder can be interpreted as a way of disciplining the sexualized fat body (89). On *The Sopranos*, LeBesco found that the fat female character felt that she must be seen dieting and wore clothing that concealed her fatness and sexuality. LeBesco applauds *The Sopranos* for their work in shifting representations of body image on television through its large male cast, yet also notes that the woman is the one insulted and criticized (55-56). Dawn French's *On Big Women* special satirically looked at images of femininity juxtaposed on a fat body (Hole). The satire brings up questions of identity and performance within fat female bodies. French's performance of hyper-femininity as a ballet dancer in a fat body calls up questions of identity and gender performance. As discussed earlier, fat women are seen as masculine in today's society. Placing two contradictory images on the same body explores the importance of identity work in fat studies.

Media representations of fatness stem mostly from fear of fat. If fat is unhealthy, ugly, and acceptable to ridiculed, a show such as *More to Love* can be seen as a way of parading fatness on television for a new layer of ridicule. When the women are not there to be saved from their fat, they are not following the expectations that fat women must be saved from fat. The show, however, does seem to offer a place of critique from what women are being saved.

To better understand the show *More to Love* one must first be aware of the phenomenon of reality-based television competition dating shows. Reality-based

programming is on the rise and already presenting arguments on fatness. Through the aforementioned *The Biggest Loser*, *Ruby*, *Dance Your Ass Off*, *Fat Friends* and *Diet Tribe*, reality television is putting forth claims of saving the fat person from their own self-destruction. *More to Love* offers more of a fairy tale mentality of saving. The fairy tale stories of reality-based television competition dating shows offers a space to study what is desirable and beautiful according to the media.

Reality-based Television Competition Dating Shows

Reality television is hard to avoid in current media times. Almost every channel has their own variation of reality television and reality shows are aired throughout the day. On any given night, you can find people trying to “make it big” through singing, dancing, modeling, designing, doing stand-up comedy, or cooking their way to fame. You can also find people competing for money trying to survive in exotic locales, race around the world, make-overs, living in a house under constant video surveillance, losing weight, or doing random stunts in a short amount of time. Reality television has become a way for stars to restart their career through tracking their lives and family in constant surveillance, going to drug or sex rehab, participating in dating shows, losing weight and living together in a residence and competing against each other. Many shows track lives of the wealthy, idle or fertile. Since its inception in 1992 with *The Real World*, over 400 seasons of reality shows have been aired. The type that has received the most academic study is the reality competition dating shows. These shows involve one lead person looking for love from about 25 single people. Through rose (*The Bachelor/ette*), key (*Frank the Entertainer: A Basement Affair*), ring (*More to Love*), backstage pass (*Rock of*

Love), clock (*Flavor of Love*), or shot glass (*A Shot at Love*) ceremonies, the lead person chooses the ones he/she wants to continue to date with the hope of fulfilling the myth of true love and heteronormative marriage with the “winner” of the show.

Reality television is a label that has received some criticism as its programs are contrived and planned by someone, yet unscripted. Hill defines reality TV as “a catch-all category that includes a wide range of entertainment programmes about real people. Sometimes called popular factual television, reality TV is located in border territories, between information and entertainment, documentary and drama” (Hill 2). The border territories are where the contention begins, as is often the case with borders. If the show is not any one of the types, but a combination and leaves humans to create the story, the question can be asked whether the show has any merit? Hill continues on to address these critiques:

Reality TV has experienced many critiques, being called “vulgar,” “encouraging moral and intellectual impoverishment in contemporary life,” “stupid and moronic,” “weapons of mass destruction,” and “causing us to become dumber, fatter and more disengaged from ourselves and society.” (7)

These criticisms have become common place. Many times I hear criticism of my love for reality TV and feel the need to justify it. These shows offer a voyeuristic participation into the lives of others. Without leaving our homes, we can now be the nosy neighbor without alienating anyone we know, as the ones being watched have invited the world in. These shows are just entertainment by offering a place for an audience to be “engaged in critical viewing of the attitudes and behaviour of ordinary people in the programmes, and the ideas and practices of the producers of the programmes” (Hill 9). The viewing can offer a space for one to unobtrusively observe and judge others.

The main difference between reality TV and scripted television is the common use of untrained actors. Other differences include “unscripted dialogue, surveillance footage, hand-held camera, seeing event unfold as they are happening in front of the camera” (Hill 41). The use of real people doing real things as they happen with what is assumed to be honesty. When *The Real World* started the show’s catchphrase was “What happens when people stop being nice and start being real,” giving the audience the thought that all that was occurring was in fact reality. Since the inception of *The Real World*, billions have tuned in to reality to see the realness of others. Many reality TV stars have made a career out of being “real” in both negative and positive ways. The idea of liveness is the draw. “In Reality TV, the fascination of seeing something unplanned happen simulates this experience of liveness, and sometimes the events that the camera witnesses are in fact live” (Bignell 115). This idea of liveness can bring a sense of connection between the audience and the cast on the show.

As reality television has continued to bring forth criticism, it is understandable that the genre is beginning to be referred to as “reality-based television” to bring into account the amount of work done behind the scenes to set up the events the casts encounter.

The term ‘reality-based television’ refers broadly to shows that are unscripted, though most have a very specific structure (with set tasks and events for each episode). The term purposely implies that the shows are based on reality without suggesting they *are* reality – emphasizing the constructedness not only of reality-based programming but also for TV representations more generally. (Dubrofsky 41, emphasis in original text)

Changing the term opened up more freedom for the creators and producers of reality television to further push the envelope of reality. Recent examples of shows that have

come out as reality-based television, even openly acknowledging their somewhat scripted nature, are MTV's *The Hills* and *My Life as Liz*.

One of the most popular forms of reality-based television is the competition dating shows. Since *Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire?* aired, the television and its viewers have been bombarded with these shows. The promise of a fairy tale romance with real people seen live on television, from the couch of the viewer, is a strong draw. Mike Fleiss is considered the creator of dating shows. He created and produced the first *Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire?* Huff argues that the reason for the success of these shows is the relatability the audience has to the cast. The relatability comes from the idea that “(v)irtually everyone has been in a relationships of some sort and has been in the perilous world of dating at one point” (108). With the main draw for these shows being women, relatability offers an avenue where romance can thrive. The winner of another show, *Joe Millionaire*, speaks of how women would approach her, after the show, sharing stories of how they cried when she won as she was an everyday person able to have her fairy tale come true (Huff 119). The fairy tale is relatable and desirable.

In looking at the myth of “happily-ever-after” and the gendered performance inherent in the statement, Stephens examines the portrayal of weddings on TLC's *A Wedding Story*. The show, while unscripted, is well planned to portray the magic of love. Stephens argues that these shows blur the line of personal and political while depicting women in very heteronormative traditional gender roles. She found that each show gives less than a minute to the woman's career, yet spends a great deal of time on the woman's role in the relationship. This fairy tale view she found to be problematic, yet comforting.

These shows offer a moment of nostalgia to “help to soothe creeping pervasive social fears by offering normalizing rituals that serve to erase ambiguity” (207). She argues that these shows calm fears by portraying that with “the right dress, right husband and ‘right’ interpretation of gender roles,” viewers of the show can live in a world where “every child is wanted and nostalgic 1950s family values really come true” (207). With the stories of divorce, abortion and gay marriage in the media, depictions of heteronormativity, at its most normative, proliferate the fairy tales and myths of love.

Maier continues to look at this fairy tale myth of *A Wedding Story*. Maier brings attention to the entire show set up, from the opening credits of a wedding album opening mysteriously in a similar nature to the start of most fairy tale movies, to the ending shot of the two love struck heterosexuals looking lovingly into each other’s eyes, as if knowing they have fulfilled a destiny. Maier, like Stephens, finds these shows to offer expectations of what love is (between a man and a woman), what society expects (a marriage) and what gender means in its most traditional sense.

The myth of love is not only a gendered story, but also one with a set plot structure that reality-based television works to manipulate for the audience. The series is set up on a very specific path of stranger to intimate that follows the romantic fairy tale plot line:

What these encounters map out is a socially coded process of becoming-intimate: spotting each other in a group, interacting one-on-one, meeting the parents, adding in the sexual relation, and finally securing the relationship by bringing the lover into the family space as the would-be spouse. (Kavka 113)

This narrative is the show’s lifeblood. The bulk of the viewing audience for these shows is women between 18 and 44 (www.tvbythenumbers.com). Feeding women these love

stories with real people finding “real love” gives hope for the dream of “The One.” Shows like *The Bachelor*, *Average Joe*, *Rock of Love*, *Shot of Love*, and even *The Conveyor Belt of Love* proliferate the myth that in a moment we will know the elusive One. “*The Bachelor*, after all is said and done, may actually be helping to queer one of the biggest public and private romantic myths there is: that of ‘The One’” (Frank 112). Frank goes on to question why the participants of the show do not give any credence to their own agency, but question the manifestation of his mythical and elusive “One.” Kavka comes at this emotional connection from a slightly different angle. He posits that this love is more of a “serialization of emotional performance” (Kavka 107). This “epistemology of love” is less of a “just know”, more of a situational performance that leads to the idea of the real thing. He continues on to say that “rather the medium provides a forum where performing love can *generate* the very emotion it seems to reveal” (Kavka 106, emphasis in original text). As much as the show is reality-based, the argument can be made that the love is the same.

Fairy tale romances have taken many forms on reality-based television. While the majority of the shows are based on heterosexual definitions of relationships, a few shows have dared to challenge that norm through shows like *A Shot at Love with Tila Tequila*, where a bisexual Asian American woman pin-up queen and internet sensation must choose between 15 men and 15 women for love. The first season, she chose a man and the second, a woman. Neither led to any sort of a “real” love connection. In 2003, Bravo brought forth the first 100% gay dating show, *Boy Meets Boy*, which lasted 8 weeks. *Playing it Straight* had one person go on three dates with people of the sex to which they

were attracted, to pick out the single competitor of their sexual orientation. More often than not, the wrong person was chosen with the claim of “chemistry” or “connection” being the cause.

As heteronormative as these shows have been, they have also been largely white. The story of love comes across on these shows as a white, heterosexual possibility and fairy tale. People of color are rarely seen on these shows. In an autoethnographic study, Boylorn, an African American scholar, looks at her own journey with reality-based television:

Until recently, I did not see a Black woman on reality TV beyond the talk show genre (*Maury*, *Jerry Springer*) and occasionally a weight loss program (*The Biggest Loser*), but Black women were not made over (*Extreme Makeover*), desirable (*The Bachelor*), or surviving (*Survivor*) on reality television. That reality has changed. Black representation on reality TV has emerged as a quick claim to fame and the more outrageous and memorable, the better. The public can’t seem to get enough of the glamorized and ghettoization of Black womanhood. (Boylorn 424).

The reality-based television shows are offering a stereotypical view of people of color.

The shows that offer more than the token person of colors are shows like *Flavor of Love*, *I Love New York*, and *Real Chance of Love*. These shows depict images of the “ghettoization” and stereotyping of all parties involved. Dubrofsky and Hardy critically studied *Flavor of Love* in juxtaposition to *The Bachelor* analyzing the performance of race in both shows. Their analysis led to the belief that Black identity “must often be actively claimed and affirmed” (379), while White subjects’ “identity is not contested: Whiteness and middle-classness is the default authentic identity that need not be actively claimed. It is assumed” (379). This assumption of authenticity can be argued to allow for more focus on the romantic narrative than on justification of identity. The women on

Flavor of Love are put in a position where they must prove to themselves and others that they are “ghetto” enough for Flavor Flav. Even the white women on the show must prove they aren’t too white in their performance of race for Flavor Flav. Their performance of self must reflect a stereotypical representation of women of color from poor neighborhoods. The expectation appears to be the less culturally white, the more attractive. Identity formation can be seen as taking precedence over the fairy tale.

This imperative to actively claim an identity on *Flavor of Love*, versus revealing an already established identity on *The Bachelor*, opens up possibilities for claiming a variety of identities at once; for foregrounding performativity and the constructedness of identities in the space of surveillance; and for complicating the requirement for authenticity in the space of the White-centered RTV shows. *The Bachelor*, by contrast, is a fairly flat text, where most participants are presented as having an already established White and middle-class identity, with little opening in the text to question how these identities are constructed. (Dubrofsky & Hardy 385-386)

The lack of identity formation in White-centered shows allows for a greater focus on the narrative without much need for character construction. The characters are constructed around their level of desirability to the main character, the bachelor/ette, not around the authenticity of performance of race.

Race allows the producers to decide how to set up the dates, the cast and the format for the show. Even the items given at the elimination ceremony are racially based. On the White-based shows the gifts given are romantic in nature, such as the rose, ring or key, while on the Black-based shows, they are clocks or larger more gaudy items that are stereotypical reflections of the bachelor/ette’s identity of color.

On the White-based dating shows, the casting director does cast people of color for the competition. Only one time, on *The Bachelor*, has a person of color made it past the first month of the show. Dubrofsky posits that the use of the person of color is cast to

“work to facilitate the coupling of white people” (*The Bachelor* 39). She goes on to argue:

By pairing white men with women of color as open to the possibility of romance, the series constructs them as implicitly willing to engage in interracial relationships. On the surface, the series operates as if color does not matter, as if people in the series (and implicitly the makers of the show) are neutral when it comes to racial differences, or cultural differences read as racial one, and will treat everyone as if these differences do not exist.... The suggestion is that white women and women of color have access to the same choices, will benefit from the same rewards, and suffer the same consequences for the choices they make. However, the choices and opportunities afforded women of color do not allow access to the central romance narrative, as they do for white women. (Dubrofsky, *The Bachelor* 44)

The purpose of the person of color is to offer a politically correct show where love is possible to all. The racial choices fall on the main cast member, the bachelor/ette. This narrative of racial diversity “frames the central narrative of two white people forming a romantic union” (Dubrofsky, *The Bachelor* 48). The people of color are available to the main character while no expectation exists for them to be chosen. Thus far, only the shows on VH1 and MTV, who are both owned by MTV Network and target younger audiences who are more open to interracial relationships, have any interracial couples come from the shows (*I Love New York 2*, *The Real Chance of Love*, *Shot at Love with Tila Tequila*), and none have lasted.

The reality-based dating shows have a set formula and expectations on what is desirable and attractive to not only the opposite sex, but the viewing audience. Kavka argues:

Heterosexual casting is a must; class status as indicated by occupation/education, like age, tends to fall within a set range; and bachelor/ettes are always white, although the suitor pool will include at least one person of color – who is never amongst the final two, or even the final four. Out of these patterns of pre-production discrimination, which we might think of as the underside of romantic

choice staged for the public gaze, the prejudices of acceptable coupling can be read out: *white professional man, late 20s, seeks white non-professional women, 22-5; others welcome to apply but will not constitute real love* (Kavka 114-5).

The idea of real love is shown to only be available to a very specific demographic. One could add a specific size, as well as race, to the argument. The line *must look good in a bikini or swimsuit* should probably be added. Fatness, like queerness and race, are almost impossible to find on reality-based competition dating shows.

Fatness in reality-based competition dating television has been seen prior to *More to Love*. On Fox's *Average Joe*, a few of the average looking men were overweight or obese. They were kept on for one week and then sent home, as Kavka argues, to show the bachelorette had an open mind regarding "anyone marked as 'handicapped'" (116-117). Later in the same series, the bachelorette donned a fat suit and eliminated the man who made the most negative remarks about the fat woman. On the first episode of *Flavor of Love 3*, the American public chose three of the women for Flavor Flav and one was a larger woman. Flavor Flav, in his private confessions to the camera asked the American people what they were thinking sending him a fat girl. He eliminated her that night with no explanation to her, while some of the others got explanations. These examples offer a narrative of men finding fatness unlovable.

This master narrative of love available to specific individuals feeds the narrative of a monogamous love. On these reality-based dating shows the end goal is monogamy. Although the monogamy is found through a polygamist method. The bachelor/ette is given a harem from which to choose his/her relationship partner. Kavka writes of the polygamist aspects of reality competition dating show looking at how polygamy, in these shows, leads to monogamy and therefore is socially acceptable. The end result being

engagement to one person “give(s) sanction to the reality of love by demarcating singular romantic possession.... A trajectory which reflects the ideal romantic narrative in popular culture” (Kavka 114). The harem is a place for the bachelor/ette to sow wild oats in heteronormative space that leads to the ideal end result of a prince and princess, usually white, finding the “One.”

The sexual gallivanting of the bachelor is ‘otherized’ within the larger romance narrative of the series; surely the bachelor is to use this time to sow his wild oats with the express purpose of settling down with the one woman at the end, presumably in a home with a white picket fence and very few Persian carpets or red pillows and certainly no elephant grazing on the front lawn. (Dubrofsky, *The Bachelor* 53).

The fact that the end result is a monogamous relationship allows the polyamory setting to exist without censure or rebellion. The bachelor of these shows, as Hill posits that such a situation:

reflects traditional social attitudes toward men as sexual predators, as the star is encouraged to be sexually active and is rewarded for his behaviour.... Shows such as *The Bachelor* and *Joe Millionaire* construct negative representations of single women, as it is the job of the single man to find the one honest woman amongst many dishonest women. (Hill 119-20)

These shows allow for this very “masculine idea” of playing the field prior to settling down. As many of these shows have a white star looking for love in a pool of mostly white counterparts, the elimination of the people of color feeds the harem structure of love:

The Bachelor’s racist, imperialist structure tells a story about the romantic heterosexual union of two white people; it relies on the myth of white man’s ability to conquer the dark Other to find his way towards the ideal white mate. Women of color and white women serve different purposes in this Orientalist set-up. White women can rise above the harem structure to become the bachelor’s chosen woman, for whom he will forsake the harem’s pleasures. Unless they can be whitened, however, women of color cannot. (Dubrofsky, *The Bachelor* 53-54).

The imperialist structure allows for a Sheik to control his realm by having the possibility to go to a “dark land to frolic before returning to more serious ventures and to his white leading lady. On the road to finding a mate, the bachelor has numerous opportunities for lusty forays with many women who await the pleasure of being conquered by him” (Dubrofsky, *The Bachelor* 48). The end result of a white heterosexual couple allows for the majority of the viewing audience to find comfort in the harem and the polygamy of the show. Frank posits monogamy as a fetish and the harem mentality of reality competition dating shows are a more honest depiction of love with the harem than the idea of only wanting one sexual partner for the rest of one’s life (114). This honest depiction gives comfort to the viewing audience that, with time and the right person, the settling down of the wild man, with the help of a good honest woman, will lead to married bliss and monogamy on the part of the Sheik.

Whiteness is present throughout these narratives. It seems inherent to the plot that the characters must be white. Once the women or men of color “appear authentic in the space of RTV by performing ghetto, this ensures their tenure on the show will be brief and dramatic” (Dubrofsky & Hardy 384). The ghettotization as mentioned above leads to a short tenure on the show so the women of color are seen fulfilling “the time-worn roles of satisfying the sexual desires of white men and taking care of white men (by highlighting the inappropriate and potentially dangerous behaviors of white women who want to marry white men)” (Dubrofsky, *The Bachelor* 54). The story being told is a “very specific story about whiteness, where whiteness is essential to finding a romantic partner. Once women of color help the white heroes find one another, they must disappear into

the background – just as the harem structure disappears to let the white master and his chosen mistress take center stage” (Dubrofsky, *The Bachelor* 54).. The women on these shows that win the heart of the bachelor do not have children, yet have careers that feed the American Dream. These series “present a popular contemporary scenario about women in the United States: the struggle to ‘have it all’ in a ‘ticking clock’ narrative, that is, a woman’s desire for career and family before she is ‘too old’ to bear children and before all the ‘good’ men are taken” (Dubrofsky, *Fallen Women in Reality TV* 353). One must fit the bill for a good wife and mother, while not having had experience in either roles, to be qualified for the job of ideal spouse. As Kavka reminds us “it is worth remembering that the social gaze is just as engaged in making aesthetic discriminations; not all lovers must be beautiful, but they should be more or less in the same ‘league’” (Kavka 115).

Reality-based competition dating shows can be looked at through many critical lenses to explore what is being shown to the viewing audience and being said about society as a whole. Two strong lenses of private and public have been studied to better understand the narrative of love on television. Kavka defines three separate spaces within which this division exist:

formal (public speaking, often ritualized, as in making announcements to or before the others), informal (private contemplation or interaction, with the camera “peeking in” [sometimes this literally means shooting through a window from outside the room]), and confessional (direct-to-camera interviews, sometimes used as a voice over without the “talking head.” (Kavka 124)

Through the screen of our televisions we are able to look at the lives of others with voyeuristic intents. We are given insights into private moments of confessionals, the peeping Tom cameras, and the interactions the cast are not all privy to. The audience

becomes the omniscient power in the relationships. We are invited into these relationships without having to reciprocate with our own relationships. As Hopson points out, “RTV offers the ability to consume the lived experiences of the Other without having to compromise the privacy of one’s own experiences” (443).

What reality-based dating competition shows afford us is the chance to become emotionally invested in a relationship where we are given emotional moments that are usually kept shrouded from the outside world. We are welcomed into these white heterosexual love stories that feed the fairy tale believers in the world.

Chapter 3:

Love Through Magnifying Lenses: The Methods Section

For those who immerse themselves in what the fairy tale has to communicate, it becomes a deep, quiet pool which at first seems to reflect only our own image; but behind it we soon discover the inner turmoils of our soul – its depth, and ways to gain peace within ourselves and with the world, which is the reward of our struggles. –Bruno Bettelheim

The fairytale is irresponsible; it is frankly imaginary, and its purpose is to gratify wishes, as a dream doth flatter. –Susanne K. Langer

She was rockin' the beer gut, and I love the way she's not ashamed.

Rockin' the beer gut, it's just some extra love around her waist. –Greg Alan

Love stories exist throughout all aspects of society. They can be found on television, in movies, books, magazines, newspapers, in parks, at restaurants, and just about anywhere human beings can be found. The love stories best known are those of fairy tales, which appear to be geared toward women (Zipes). The childhood tales of love are spread through fairy tales and movies, especially animated movies. The chick flick

genre, movies geared toward a female audience (usually romantic dramas/romantic comedies), is a large moneymaker for Hollywood (second top grossing film of all time is *Titanic* according to the AMC Company in 2010). Reality dating shows put forth the myth of love to audiences demonstrating that love is available and possible. Love in these narratives implies that a woman must be saved to be loved (Cloud; Dubrofsky; Hill). When a woman is put in a situation when she must compete for that love story, what must the woman sacrifice for love? The fat female body in a love story offers a space to better understand the oppression of women and the oppression particularly of fat women in today's society. To fully understand what reality competition dating shows are putting forth to the audience, one should look at the feminist implications and their connections to the myth of love.

The feminist theory and the mythic analysis will be accomplished through a critical interpretive lens. With the critical interpretive lens, the researcher is held accountable for their positionality and subjectivity. As a fat woman, this study will be seen through that lens. Using the critical interpretive lens, the analysis will be more free flowing and interpretive than a more traditional method of research. Interpretive research looks at the public for the undercurrents that are not always readily explicated to the public (Deetz). It looks for the message within the message. With critical interpretive analysis, this study will critically analyze the messages within *More to Love* to look for what the public discourse means and says without actually clearly stating it.

Theoretical Framework: Feminist Theory, Intersectionality, and the Body

Feminist theory stems from the feminist movements of the nineteenth and twentieth century. The feminist movement worked for equity between the sexes (Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Simone de Beauvoir, to name a few). Many feminist scholars began working towards providing a lens to examine the world to find moments of inequality and a voice to critique those inequalities in order to offer alternatives to the hegemonic discourses and material realities of patriarchy (Gloria Anzaldúa, bell hooks, Cherríe Moraga to name a few). Two specific areas of feminist theory will inform this project: Intersectionality and theorizing of the body.

When the feminist movement began, it was touted as a movement for all women. Throughout history movements have been exalted as good for all (suffrage movements for the right to vote for women, affirmative action, school integration), yet, in reality, it is difficult to move beyond singular identity movements (hooks). The feminist movement is one specific example of how a monolithic identity construction, manifested in many sub-movements, alienated and isolated those who did not fit and had Other experiences, namely, women of color. hooks (2000) posited that feminist theory has been lacking in its look at the intersection of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Identity is not made up from any one location, but an intersection of identities. Equity must be available for all, not just the white women, and white women must be aware of their white privilege. hooks, Crenshaw, Hill Collins, Anzaldúa and Moraga brought to the forefront that the plight of women doesn't just exist in the sex of the woman; it exists in the intersections of identities (i.e., race, class, gender, sexuality). These critiques attempt to locate the

nuances of identity and power. Studying feminist scholarship through the lens of (invisible) whiteness isn't enough.

Patricia Hill Collins (2000) makes the call for empowerment through knowledge. She challenges women to gain more knowledge to acquire more power. Hill Collins is positing that to gain power one must have knowledge; knowledge of the current situation, historical foundations, and the needs for the future. Throughout her research, Hill Collins calls into question the oppression of African Americans focusing on Black women. Through hegemonic discourses of power, Hill Collins looks at definitions of Black and woman. The definitions given by society and media limit the possibilities of Black women to service and policing forces. The societal oppression limits definitions of beauty to smooth hair, blue eyes, and fair skin. These standards of beauty lead to a disregard of African American women's beauty (286). Hill Collins calls for two dimensions of empowerment: 1) to gain critical consciousness of the hegemonic discourses and 2) to construct new ideologies (286). The need for self-empowerment and a free mind is crucial for discourses to be spoken and heard (285). Her call opens up possibility to speak out against the matrix of domination.

The matrix of domination opens up discussion of the multiple identities that come into play that can be oppressed in the body. Hill Collins looks at sexuality, race, gender, ethnicity, physical ability, and religion as the main sources of oppression in the matrix. The oppression occurs in the structure of power (systemic), discipline of power (bureaucracy), hegemony of power (discourse) and interpersonal levels of power (relationships). Each of these levels plays into how the body is disciplined and oppressed.

A fat (physical ability), white (race/ethnicity), Presbyterian (religion), heterosexual (sexuality) woman (gender) faces minimal oppression, that of perceived physical ability and gender. This woman receives oppression at a different level than a wheelchair using, black, Muslim, bisexual woman. The layers of identity lead to a more complex oppression. The point is not to engage in oppression Olympics, but rather to understand how multiple and intersecting identities create simultaneous spaces of empowerment and disempowerment. Due to the complexity of oppression, difficulty arrives in attempting to form a unified womanhood. Through the person's intersecting identities in the body, Hill Collins calls for self-empowerment to challenge the systems of power in place. The body is the source of much oppression and must be studied to better understand this marginalization.

The body is one space of marginalization as it is marked by its visibility and the meanings associated with it. Before a word is spoken in an encounter, the body has been marked, based on its appearance and the meanings associated with it. Because of hegemonic values, one who is thin, white, clean, nicely dressed and smiling is seen as more desirable than one who is fat, of color, dirty, and dressed in jeans, even if smiling. These identifiers are often the first way in which a person is deemed worthy or unworthy. Intersectionality calls into question the multiple identity markers that play into how the body is seen. Feminist scholarship looks to the body as the place where femaleness is overtly marked. The female body has historically been marginalized and defined as less than the male body (Bordo). Studying the female body “promises a means of destabilizing the tyranny of systematic blindness of sexual differences” (Riley 224). In

these differences the oppression occurs. To better understand the body in feminist scholarship, gender is at the crux of the theories.

Communication scholars study men and women asking the question of how sex and gender impact how people communicate. Studying gender roles is a field that has been opened further by the research of Judith Butler, a Foucaultian scholar, in her revolutionary book *Gender Trouble*. When looking at the performance of gender, Judith Butler attempts to clarify the distinction between sex and gender stating:

the distinction between sex and gender serves the argument that whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed: hence, gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex. The unity of the subject is thus already potentially contested by the distinction that permits of gender as a multiple interpretation of sex. (8)

Gender being sex neutral allows for the fluidity and the performances of masculinity and femininity to be available to anyone, regardless of biological sex, though still subject to societal disciplining. Femininity is not inherently female nor is masculinity inherently male. Societal norms dictate that to be a female, femininity is imperative. Performance offers a person to choose their gender.

As Butler points out repeatedly, gender is not something born with, but something learned. She writes, “gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence” (34). She explains that through repetition, one establishes one’s gender. This repetition is socially constructed through multiple performances with the cast of one’s life. Gender performance is argued to be a socially constructed performance. This performance begins from birth with the color selections of clothing and bedroom decor to the toy selections given to the child.

This performance is solidified, as one grows older. Many conform to societal norms, while some explode the norms and perform what feels comfortable rather than what society expects. Lessons can be learned from both the social construction of gender as well as what can be learned from those who push the socially accepted performances.

Madison shows that identity is “largely mediated through the performer’s body” (283); thus, body is an integral part of identity performance. Butler (2006) also stresses that the body shows significance, “The sex/gender distinction and the category of sex itself appear to presuppose a generalization of ‘the body’ that pre-exists the acquisition of its sexed significance. The ‘body’ often appears to be a passive medium that is signified by an inscription from a cultural source figured as ‘external’ to that body” (175). The body must be studied when looking at gender. While sex is a physical marker, the performance of gender is done in large part through the body.

The body is often overlooked in Communication Studies. Queer, performance, intercultural, and feminist scholarship have worked to bring it to the forefront, but more work must still be done. By using the body as a space of research, resistance and conformity are more readily observed and defined. With the body being marked by the judgments of society and the media, looking at how it is perceived is imperative to understand what it means to be female. The female body is considered weaker due to the muscle formation. Bordo brought into the conversation the need to minimize the female form to an almost male figure through anorexia and bulimia. In an informal study done in her classroom, Bordo found that the majority of the female students expressed angst, frustration or extreme dislike about their bodies (137). The aforementioned dislike, in

Bordo's argument, stems in part from the mediated representations of beauty found in advertisements. Bordo argues that most approaches to body image "ignores the fact that for most people in our culture, slenderness is indeed equated with competence, self-control and intelligence, and feminine curvaceousness with wide-eyed, giggly vapidty" (55). The feminist perspective offered here is one that, through the control of the female body, intelligence and competence are afforded to the woman who demonstrates control. The body is culturally conscripted as better the more masculine it looks. The thinner and less curvy the body, the more attractive it is portrayed. As ideal beauty is an ever-changing definition, the definition is therefore defined through images. Wolf brings forth the current ideal being driven by a large diet market as well as based on the outward appearance of women as healthy and thin (14-17). The viewer of the external decides the worth. Through discourse surrounding the female body, women and men are being taught how to see bodies and assign value to them (Bordo 57). In their study, Moon and Sedgwick call to question what the fat body is representing within the dominant discourse of bodies. Divine, as a large transgendered woman in John Waters' films (*Mondo Trasho*, *Polyester* and *Hairspray*, to name a few), is critiqued as a countertext to the dominant discourse. Through her larger than life personality and her gender bending, she goes against the dominant discourse of feminine norms. Divine is anything but feminine while performing female. Her fatness and happiness are in direct violation of the norms of thin as happy. Moon and Sedgwick discuss their own body images and mediated representations of those like them. Sedgwick discusses how fatness is similar to queerness in the necessity to come out. Throughout the text, the reader is able to

experience the objectification of the body and how it is treated when different. The body is a space where difference is available for clear marking and clear diminishing of a person's worth.

Feminist theory works to establish a space for the multiple identities and markings of women to be critiqued and analyzed for the differences, the “mechanisms by which bodies are recognized as different only in so far as they are constructed as possessing or lacking some socially privileged quality or qualities” (Gatens 232). The privileged space is reserved for the bodies that fit within cultural constructions of beauty and acceptability. (Bordo 311). Bordo questions this homogenization and normalization by questioning what ideal is. She posits that for an ideal to exist it would mean that one universal woman exists. The body of each woman is different. It is through the differences that feminist scholarship is able to be open to discussions of weight.

Within the discussion of fatness and feminism, the subject of desirability is inherent. The question of love and romantic relationships exist in the desirability. Most young female children grow up hearing about the myth of heterosexual romantic love. Through fairy tales and narratives, love can appear to be the ultimate goal; the love that leads to “happily-ever-after.” What do reality dating competition shows like *More to Love* tell us about the myth of love, particularly as it intersects with issues of the fat female body?

Mythic Narrative of Love: A Fairy Tale

Throughout the inhabited world, in all times and under every circumstance, the myths of man have flourished; and they have been the living inspiration of whatever else may have appeared out of the activities of the human body and mind. It would not be too much to say that myth is the secret opening through

which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation. Religious, philosophies, arts, the social forms of primitive and historic man, prime discoveries in science and technology, the very dreams that blister sleep, boil up from the basic, magic ring of myth. (Campbell 3)

Love has many definitions in our society: the love between parent and child, between friends, between siblings, and the “ultimate” love, romantic love. bell hooks, argues that love can be broken down by how it is felt, not exactly by the type of partnership. Her definitions of love include Grace, Clarity, Justice, Honesty, Commitment, Spirituality, Values, Greed, Community, Mutuality, Romance, Loss, Healing and Destiny. Each of these builds on each other as relationships develop. Her definition of romantic love, usually labeled true love is when “individuals feel in touch with each other’s core identity” (184). hooks brings forth the idea that the fairy tale love of childhood is not romantic love, but a false ideal fed to children to establish gender norms and a feeling of unworthiness when the relationship does not occur.

Within reality competition dating shows, the goal is romantic love as defined by hooks and the fairy tales, a contradictory or mythic love. The love of the reality competition dating shows is a crash course love where the hope is for a prince to learn your core identity in a condensed amount of time while your prince is dating other women. While you often hear, I want to marry my best friend, the best friend described is not with the neutrality that friend love involves, but desirability as a part of that love. To better understand this myth of love, one must first understand how myth defines love.

“Once upon a time” starts many stories in our literary world. These four words open up a world of fairy tales and myths where love happens, miracles happen. They start the reader or hearer off on a journey of discovery; discovery of love, discovery of self,

discovery of possibilities. *Cinderella* is one of the most famous and popular stories that have this type of opening. Cinderella, a lovely young maid who is sorely mistreated by her wicked stepmother and vain stepsisters after having lost her mother and father. Her tragic tale ends with a happy ending when she meets and falls in love with the handsome prince who saves her from her strife and most importantly falls in love with her making her his princess. Depending on the version one is most familiar with, the evil and vain in Cinderella's life get their just desserts through either watching their prince ride off with someone seen as less worthy, lose their eyes to attacking birds, or end up mutilated in a desperate attempt to fit properly into a shoe. This basic storyline is present in books, movies, TV shows and songs. Most notably is the use of this story line in *Pretty Woman*, a movie with a prostitute fulfilling the Cinderella myth with a business tycoon. Analyses of this story line through *Pretty Woman* posit that the storyline shifts slightly in a feminist direction (while never fully reaching feminist goals) with Vivian, the prostitute, saving Edward, the business tycoon, from a lonely life without emotion or love as he saves her from the dirty life of prostitution (Lapsley and Westlake 28). While Lapsley and Westlake point out a shared saving, the one with real power is the Prince or Edward (Kelley 92). The power never fully leaves the male lead who is always in control of the storyline. Examples of this saving are found throughout pop culture, not just in *Cinderella* and *Pretty Woman*. Disney is fraught with examples of this. In *The Little Mermaid*, Eric must save Ariel from her life in the water with his love and her father, King Triton, must save her from the grips of the evil sea witch Ursula. The voice of the innocent young love hungry mermaid is only given to her when she has earned the love

of her prince (Sells). Prior to this, she is silenced by her circumstances and the trickery of an overweight evil witch who wants power from Ariel's father. The men in her life define her life. She cannot save herself but must be saved. Her "happily-ever-after" comes after she is chosen to be loved. This phenomenon is clearly evident in the reality-dating genre. Reality TV has commandeered this story line in hopes of providing "happily-ever-after" to the contestants on the dating shows.

The narrative of myths and fairy tales can consist of many threads: love, death, hero, Divine intervention, struggles of good versus evil, lessons from nature and the natural world, expectations of behavior in males and females, and many more. For the purpose of this study the mythic narrative will be defined as the mythic narrative of love. To better understand the mythic narrative of love, the following terms will be conceptualized: myth, fairy tale, and love.

Myths are a part of the everyday world. They are taught in schools, told through books, movies and television, and reenacted constantly. Myths can be defined in many ways. Roland Barthes defines myth as a "system of communication, that is a message" (109) that can hold a historical, semiological and ideological foundation portrayed through symbols. Kenneth Burke defines myth as "a narrative that effects identification within the community that takes it seriously, endorsing shared interests and confirming the given notion of order, while at the same time gesturing toward a more comprehensive identification – that is among humanity, the earth, and the universe" (Coupe 6). Joseph Campbell's definition looks at myth as a "directing of the mind and heart, by means of profoundly informed figurations, to that ultimate mystery which fills and surrounds all

existence” (267). These three definitions paint a picture of myth as a communicative function of society to afford identification through symbolism and to explain the mystery or one’s existence.

Myth is a communicative function of society. Within Barthes’ explanation of myth as a symbolic form of communication he lays out the three main components of myth: form, concept and signification. The form of the myth is its meaning that is usually symbolic; the concept is something with no ambiguity; and the signification are the signs of language (117). The meaning of myth stems from historical ambiguity that over time takes on a place of truth.

The meaning of myth has its own value, it belongs to a history,... a signification is already built, and could very well be self-sufficient if myth did not take hold of it and did not turn it suddenly into an empty parasitical form. The meaning is *already* complete, it postulates a kind of knowledge, a past, a memory, a comparative order of facts, ideas, decisions (Barthes 117, emphasis in original text).

The value of myth is its ability to afford a place for interpretation of meaning. The relationship between myth and human is not one “based on truth, but on use: they depoliticize according to their needs” (Barthes 144). Using myth to explain a communicative moment affords a depoliticizing of the myth. When defining a concept such as love, myth plays a rather substantial role in the definition. Love, as an abstract concept, warrants examples. Most examples consist of form, concept and signification. The form of love is in its meaning. The concept of love is finite with little room for ambiguity. The signification of love is “constituted by a sort of constantly moving turnstile which presents alternately the meaning of the signifier and its form, a language-object and a metalanguage, a purely signifying and purely imagining consciousness”

(123). Myth offers up reasons, not motives for the concepts. The mythical speech is understood to be “perfectly explicit” (129) due to society’s acceptance of the historical definition of the mythical concept. The ideographic system of myth allows for the form and concept to be represented without “covering the sum of its possibilities for representation” (127). Barthes’ definition of myth opens up for interpretation the historical and symbolic messages of the text.

Having the historical and symbolic messages to interpret, Burke posits myth as a way of establishing identification. He sets up this identification in dramatism. Dramatism is an alternate way of looking at myth through Burke’s pentad of act, scene, agent, agency and purpose. Act names what took place in thought or deed (Burke *Grammar* XV). Using act to establish myth affords for action to be considered as a part of the myth explanation. Scene is the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred (XV). Scene takes into account more than just the location (XV). Scene looks at context in conjunction with location. Agent is the person or kind of person who does the act (XV). The agent is in performance terms the actor. The act can take place in the scene by the agent. The agent usually has agency, or the means or instrument used to act. Agency consists of the power or ability to act (XV). Purpose is the reason behind the action (XV). The agent uses agency with purpose to act in a scene. These are the basic pieces in relationship in dramatism. Coupe defines Burke’s dramatism as a “universal norm in that it asserts the intrinsic rights and responsibilities that go with the capacity for symbolic action” (92). Dramatism offers a way of symbolically defining narratives. To understand the meaning of a myth, one must look beyond the literal into the “dialectical transcending

of sensory images and the dialectical critique of ideas” (Burke *Rhetoric* 202). Using myth as a way of interpretation calls for one to look beneath the surface of the action and scene of the agent, but to the agency and purpose, as well within the form, concept, and signification.

To use the pentad of Burke and the three terms of Barthes, one must look at the mystery the myth is trying to decipher. Campbell claims the “prime function of mythology and rite to supply the symbols that carry the human spirit forward, in counteraction to those other constant human fantasies that tend to tie it back” (11). Campbell, as with Barthes and Burke, looks at the importance of symbols as “vehicles of communication” in myth. The symbols become metaphors to be lived by. The metaphors, according to Campbell, are used to serve societies as “the mainstays of thought and life” (256). Myths are used to teach and study to better understand the whole human. As mentioned earlier, myths are used to teach important life lessons. The hero, the main focus of Campbell’s study, is given the role of the agent of the lesson. Whether being taught the importance of listening to our elders, the power of love, the necessity of struggle and the ultimate result of winning, myths are used as universal stories through society to explain what is expected to be a just and good person. The use of myth is a way of “telling metaphors of the destiny of man, man’s hope, man’s faith and man’s dark mystery” (260). Due to the prevalent nature of myth, the symbolism has taken on significance in psychology and communication.

One of the more popular styles of myth is the fairy tale. Fairy tales have a magical power of telling a story where a hero succeeds, a heroine rises from the ashes, and evil is

dealt with in a manner that fits the crimes of the evildoer. Love is a popular theme in fairy tales and fairy tales have a strong voice in society. Fairy tales speak “to all levels of the human personality, communication in manner which reaches the uneducated mind of the child as well as that of the sophisticated adult” (Bettelheim 5-6). The accessibility of these stories to all ages gives them a sustainability that sees favored stories passed from generation to generation, making them story lines that become part of the person telling and hearing the stories. Fairy tales, as a myth, are used to teach moral lessons. As Zipes points out myths are ways of reinforcing “the patriarchal symbolic order based on rigid notions of sexuality and gender” (*Fairy Tales* 74). Small children are taught that love is a man who saves a woman from distress and gives her the world through the “happily-ever-after” of marriage. Fairy tales also establish that to be saved by the man one must be a victim and beautiful to get the rewards offered in the tales (Zipes *Don’t Bet* 190). The victim mentality affords the man the power to not only save, but also hurt the woman. In the Cinderella story, the vain stepsisters needed saving as well, but only received the hurt as they weren’t as fair as Cinderella.

Fairy tales have been around for centuries and from many different cultures. The story of Cinderella is rumored to have its foundation in a Chinese fairy tale. Most of the ones that are known today and have sustained came from Europe and most notably the Grimm Brothers. Walt Disney, in the 1930s, made them more palatable for young audiences by removing most of the more gruesome aspects of fairy tales and by putting them on the small and silver screen. Disney put a larger emphasis on the male hero and his abilities to save (Zipes *Fairy Tales* 94). Through Disney’s mechanizations of

depiction of both the hero and the heroine, the mythos of beauty strengthened. All Disney princesses are tiny in stature with long flowing straight hair, big beautiful eyes, and are in a dire predicament from which they need to be saved. In Disney movies, all representations of fatness are shown as either sloth, evil, or asexual. Whether in Disney or traditional fairy tales, beauty is rewarded. Zipes argues that “If a child identifies with the beauty, she may learn to be suspicious of ugly girls, who are portrayed as cruel, sly and unscrupulous in these stories; if she identifies with the plain girls, she may learn to be suspicious and jealous of pretty girls, beauty being a gift of fate, not something to be attained” (Zipes *Don't Bet* 188). As fairy tales are popular stories to be read to young children, especially young girls, these definitions of beauty and the narrative of love are proliferated. When one hears that a female is looking for her Prince Charming, no explanation is needed of what that means.

As fairy tales define an idealistic view, they also fail to address real problems confronting women in today's American society. A false reality is presented where the problems of today are concealed such as the inequality between males and females, teen pregnancy, STDs, single parenthood, and domestic violence (Zipes *Fairy Tales* 147). The real world is not taken into account, even in Hollywood reproductions of the fairy tale plots. The fairy tale has a power of definition and instruction of a world that for many is unattainable, yet the average reader is led to believe that it is the norm.

Fairy tales hold such power due to their ability to reach all recesses of the human psyche. Psychologists and literary scholars have studied the impact these stories have. Bettelheim puts forth that fairy tales are so powerful in part because of the ability to use

symbolic language to meet all parts of the conscious and unconscious mind. Through the fairy tale content, “inner psychological phenomena are given body in symbolic form” (36). Desires, dreams, thoughts, ideas and feelings are given a body within the fairy tale and space to be seen as real possibilities. Von Franz adds to this by addressing the structure of myth being disseminated to cultures in a way that is conducive with the “cultural collective consciousness of the nation” to make it more of a historical narrative of that culture and thereby attainable by members of the culture (27). Through time and retelling, myths take on the form that fits the culture upon which the story is being told. Using universal ideas of good versus evil, love, strife, family, and dreams, fairy tales are able to grow and flourish in most cultures with just a little editing for the collective conscious. “The fairy tale, for example, offers the story of the unnoticed little boy who goes out into the worlds and makes a great success of life. Details may differ, but the basic plot is always the same: the unlikely hero proves himself through slaying dragons, solving riddles, and living by his wits and goodness until eventually he frees the beautiful princess, marries her, and lives happily-ever-after” (Bettelheim 111). Using simple storylines fairy tales take on a form of their own symbolic communication that is universally accepted.

In the present time of media and information, fairy tales are still standing strong. These types of mythic narrative offer utopian views. With the way the fairy tales are being used by movie creators, Disney executives, reality-based television show creators, musicians, and TV show creators, Zipes put forth the question whether fairy tales can maintain their utopian function in a credible manner (*Fairy Tales* 161). With the narrative

being told and retold, it may have to struggle to keep its utopian function. Add to the retelling of the narrative, many shows based on the fairy tale theme of love do not have happy endings that are expected from the narrative. Due to the extreme lack of success reality dating show stars have had with love, the fairy tale of these types of shows is being called to question.

These narratives offer the end result of love. At a young age, children are taught the importance of love. Love is the ultimate end result of courtship and the most exciting part of a young girl's life. At the point that one finds love with another is the point where one reaches full potential (Zipes *Don't Bet* 199). This love is not the love of parent to child or friend-to-friend, it is the Eros love as defined by Plato. Many scholars question what exactly is love. Solomon argues that love is socially constructed as the ultimate collaboration of sexual attraction, biological impulses and attraction that is compounded into a greater phenomenon that has its penultimate moment in a verbal expression of affection (35). Assigning one definition to the phenomenon of falling in love is incredibly difficult.

There is no cross-cultural definition of love. Rather love is defined by a narrative, a culturally defined story (or set of stories) that weave our culture's sense of individual choice and autonomy, our natural sexuality and our political and personal sense of equality into the familiar process of 'falling in love' and its consequences. (Solomon 47-48)

These narratives are what give individuals an idea of what love should be. Love should be all encompassing; the can't eat, can't sleep, can't focus, all one can do is think of the other person. Lewis et al. define being in love as twisting "together three high-tensile strands: a potent feeling that the other fits in a way that no one has before or will again, an irresistible desire for skin-to-skin proximity, and a delirious urge to disregard all else"

(Lewis et al. 206). These strands are laden with promises: promises of happiness, a better life, and a more complete self, future and family (Solomon 279). The narrative rarely tells of the downside of these promises, the loss of freedom, autonomy, and in many cases, power over self. As Solomon points out the greatest loss happens for the females in the relationship (279). He posits the reason for this to impact women more than men as women are in more need psychologically of acceptance and esteem (290-291). In the social construction of love, the definitions taught are those of the women being saved, rescued, and given full “womanhood” through the love of a man. This narrative becomes fact in the minds of society through its constant retelling. De Rougemont asserts that through Hollywood’s selling of this love, sentimentality has replaced reason and the desire for “true love” intensifies (234). The term true love, like the term love, seems socially constructed. The idea that each person has one ideal mate that they must find, through whatever journey and hardships, is the ultimate goal. “Don’t settle. Wait for the one” are common phrases told to young girls in their search for this love.

While love has been defined many ways, the idea of Eros love is one that is difficult to define. The search for definitions of love is constant. Hollywood releases multiple love stories a year to feed the needs of the people to experience this love. The top-grossing movies of all times, *Titanic* and *Avatar*, have found ways to appeal to the female audience with love stories and the male audience with special effects. Many actors, like Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan, have built their careers on the love stories. Television brings this narrative into homes daily with versions of this love story. This narrative of love can be found in every facet of life and gives hope constantly. Defining

love is nearly impossible as each person has their own definition, yet one main thread continues through; love is possible, available with the right amount of work, and the ultimate feeling.

In Eros love, beauty is the desired end result. While beauty is as difficult to define as love, the search is often considered lacking in reason. Love is considered irrational, lacking in intelligence. Burke argues that the two are not in direct opposition, but on different planes of the person's psyche (*Grammar* 123). Emotions and intelligence often seem to work in flux between each. Shakespeare tells us in *Romeo and Juliet*, what is considered by most literary scholars as the greatest love story ever told, that love is tragic, laden with struggle, yet something one cannot fight once felt. The *Bible* gives a definition of love in 1 Corinthians that is the most commonly used verse in weddings that love is patient, kind, not jealous or boastful, that of all that we cherish, love is the greatest of things. As we are told by the Beatles, "All you need is love." *Grease* tells us "Love is a many splendored thing." Yet Tina Turner tells us "love is a second hand emotion." Trying to avoid popular culture defining love for us would involve living in a popular culture-free zone. Definitions of love exist everywhere. Solomon sums up love the following way, "Love is elusive because we are trying to define a creative act in the making, trying to catch fully formed that which can be ours only in time, insisting on proof and assurances when it is in fact up to us whether 'I love you' has any meaning at all" (Solomon 38). *More to Love* demonstrates throughout its narrative that love is fluid and must be defined by each person involved.

Informed by these perspectives on the myth narrative and definitions of fairy tales, the story of *More to Love* is offering a chance to better understand the appeal of reality competition dating shows to women. With the fat female contestants being offered a chance at this mythic narrative of love, the performance of the hero and heroine become queered by their performance against the master narrative of beauty as thin and become gendered within that performance. As Barthes extols “Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation, but that of a statement of fact” (143). The love being sought by the contestants on *More to Love* is the all-consuming love. Each contestant is seeking her own narrative, her own love story that will stand the test of time and be told for generations to come.

The fairy tale romance myth follows Burke’s pentad in its set up. The fairy tale myth has the Act and Scene in its plot points, the Agents and Agency in its characters and its Purpose in its moral. The Act and Scene of the romance myth are the introduction of the characters, the strife the lead characters must go through to find love, the presence of an evil outside source that is working to destroy one or both of the characters, and the finding of love at the end of the story that ends with “Happily Ever After.” The Agents and Agency are the stock characters all fairy tales have to drive the story forward. The main characters are the prince, the damsel in distress, the magical character, and the evil or wicked individual whose sole purpose is to break up the predestined couple. The magical character is usually a narrator of sorts who has the power to appear and disappear at serious moments in the story, as well as help the prince on his quest. The Purpose of

the fairy tale myth is the moral of the story. The quest is for love and its healing and fulfilling powers. Love is the ultimate reward and only afforded to those who are seen as worthy and desirable enough. The fairy tale is afforded to those who are deemed worthy. The fairy tale romance myth is more than a simple love story, it is a tale that transcends time that offers the lesson that to be loved, you must be good of heart, positive of spirit, and appealing of face.

To further analyze the myth of love beyond the definition from Barthes above, Burke will be applied to not only tell the tale, but assist in framing the characters within the tale. With the main agent as the bachelor who portrays the hero, Campbell's definition of hero as a person on a quest to betterment of self will be applied to evaluate Luke's (the bachelor) performance throughout the show as edited by the myth-creator, Mike Fleiss. The women will be studied using Zipes definition of the damsels in distress as the beautiful who must be chosen to be seen as worthy.

In conversation with the myth is the performance of the women. To better interpret the performances of the women, the bachelor, the viewing audience, and the myth creator, LeBesco and Bordo's definitions of feminism will be applied to the study. The view of size as reason for oppression, marginalization and masculination of the female form will provide a hermeneutic to apply intersectionality as defined by hooks and Hill Collins.

Within this study, the mythic narrative of love, with its male domination, will be put in conversation with feminist theory and the questions of fatness as beauty. The body is an oft-contested place of study. When putting the fat female body in a place usually

reserved for thin women, *More to Love* offered a place to see the hope for love in multiple body types. As fat is just one identity within the show, the intersectionality of the identities of the women as objects of desire will be questioned along with the objectification of each woman. In 2009, when the show aired, feminist theory has long existed along with the idea that women are allowed to be independent beings. When twenty successful women come together to win the love of one man, the power of the myth of love is offered as a counter-thesis to feminism. With the fat female form as the place of both the myth and gendered performance, the contestants perform self in a unique environment in front of an audience of millions with editors deciding what is shown in a proffered reality of love and real women.

The show aired for one season of eight episodes. Each episode worked toward the bachelor choosing one woman. Applying the theories of the body and feminism from LeBesco and Bordo who both posit that fatness is as female as thinness. Both argue that the fat body is marginalized as a way of control over the female form. This control is done by both men and women to further hierarchies of power and control. *More to Love* was proposed as a challenge to the power dynamics of thin as better, yet was not renewed after the one season due to lack of viewing audience. While the show was well intentioned, it continued through the selections aired each week to continue the oppression. This study will examine the expressed intention versus the end result of the show's goal through the series, press coverage, and websites focusing on the show to offer a counter-narrative to the normal thin is ideal in love narrative that is found throughout popular culture.

Chapter 4:

Love Through a Rose-Colored Lens: *More to Love* as a Mythic Fairy Tale

The fairy tale, for example, offers the story of the unnoticed little boy who goes out into the world and makes a great success of life. Details may differ, but the basic plot is always the same: the unlikely hero proves himself through slaying dragons, solving riddles, and living by his wits and goodness until eventually he frees the beautiful princess, marries her, and lives happily-ever-after. –Bettelheim 111

Fat bottomed girls you make the rockin' world go round. –Queen

Love does not have shape or size. It is the size of your heart that really matters. That's for all the big girls out there who thought they can't find love. I'm the living proof. –Tali

More to Love Episode 8

As most fairy tales start, we will begin our story with “Once upon a time...” Once upon a time a television producer, Mike Fleiss, decided to expand his reality competition dating empire to include the “average” American woman. As the myth creator, he set out to find a noble hero to go on the ultimate quest for love. As Barthes defines, the “myth

creator is not part of the myth, wreaks havoc on the language, runs risk of causing the reality which he purports to protect, to disappear” (158). Mike Fleiss, in his role as myth creator, creates a television series that tells the story he manipulates from the actual journey of our hero. Through editing, the audience is given a specific narrative of love to follow the story of our hero and damsels. The journey we are privy to is one of the myth creator’s manipulating and must be seen as such. While the audience is not given all the occurrences that make up the true narrative, we are given what the myth creator chooses for us to see. As Dubrofsky points out, reality television has been criticized as contrived not “real,” so is more reality-based television as it is not scripted, yet constructed for a specific viewing audience (41). The construction of *More to Love* done by the myth creator, Mike Fleiss, is one geared toward a female viewing audience who can sympathize with the reality of the female contestants of the show. As the narrative of our hero, Luke, and his twenty damsels is constructed and edited, one is only privileged to part of the story. The privileged part tells its own narrative which will be analyzed here.

Our myth creator, on his search for the perfect hero for his tale, found Luke Conley to be cast as the hero. With the perfect hero cast, the myth creator must now find his damsels to play the counter role for Luke’s heroic journey. Before the journey can begin, the characters must be met.

Our Hero: Luke Conley

In every good story, we find a hero that must overcome adversity to be afforded his desires. Whether it is Hercules needing to prove his worth to be afforded God status or Prince Charming battling the villain who stands in his way of true love, the hero has

the power and choices in the tales. In *More to Love*, our hero is Luke Conley. Luke is a 26-year-old Real Estate Investor from Santa Maria, California. He tells us in the first episode he is proud to be making six figures at 26 years of age. Luke stands at 6'3" tall and weighs 330 pounds. His Body Mass Index (BMI) is 41.2, which is considered Obese.¹

The hero, as defined by Joseph Campbell, is one that must survive personal and societal adversities to lead others to a better world. The hero has “to battle past his personal and local historical limitations to the generally valid, normally human forms.” The hero, either male or female, is “eloquent, not of the present, disintegrating society and psyche, but of the unquenched source through which society is reborn” (Campbell 19). As the hero in this study is male, he must exceed the limitations of present day, enter his quest and then “return then to us, transfigured, and teach the lesson he has learned of life renewed” (Campbell 19-20). Luke Conley is our hero by this definition. He overcame his self-esteem issues in his youth when he felt unlovable and unattractive as a child. As he tells the audience in the first episode, he came to the realization that women do desire him, Luke shares his acceptance of himself and how he desires a woman with the same self-acceptance. He speaks of his love for food while images of him grilling with his friends are displayed on the screen. He eloquently waxes on his ideal woman being one who is voluptuous and curvy, fun loving, self-aware, and confident. The audience is

¹ Obese is defined here by the Center for Disease Control. The scale states that under 18.5 is underweight, 18.5-24.8 is normal, 25.0-29.9 is overweight, and 30.0 and higher is obese. The scale is calculated using the following formula: weight (lb) / [height (in)]² x 703.

invited into the world of his friends, food, his dog and his career. We, the viewers, are offered a glimpse of his struggles, his triumphs, and his passions.

Throughout the course of the show he performs the role of friend, advisor, confidant, boyfriend, Prince Charming (even taking one woman on a date to a castle), knight in shining armor (he even has a photo on his Facebook page of him in armor), counselor and savior of lonely, fat girls. Luke is not your typical reality show bachelor.

He is not left out of the drama of the women; he is not afforded the luxury of being able to truly get to know the girls until the last few episodes. The way the show airs, he is portrayed as a saving grace for the women. He is not just the hero for the fat women on the show, but for fat women everywhere. As many of the contestants on the show repeatedly point out, he is a man who is willing to look beyond the external to love the person within, no matter size.

Our Damsels in Distress: The Twenty Women Vying for Luke's Love and Hand

Luke and the audience are introduced to twenty women who are there to fight for the chance to be his Mrs. Conley. Each woman is introduced to Luke in true *Bachelor* style: exiting the limo. Instead of just learning the name, city of residence and occupation, we are also given their heights and weights on the screen under their names.

The first contestant we meet is Malissa, a 26-year-old waitress from Los Angeles.

Malissa has never considered herself fat, just “big boned, because who wants to look like a stick.” Malissa is 5’4” tall and weighs 170 pounds with a BMI of 29.2, which makes her overweight. Next we meet Christina who wishes “to be 50 pounds lighter” and is always the biggest of her friends. She is a 23-year-old student from Brighton, Michigan, who

stands at 5'5" and weighs 206 pounds, which makes her BMI 33.2, classifying her as obese. Heather is the next woman out of the limo at 5'5" tall, weighing 200 pounds, and a BMI of 33.3, which also classifies her as obese. She is a cocktail waitress from Ankeny, Iowa, who has found that weight impacts her love life. She tells us with tears in her eyes she is "so ready to fall in love" and "would be wonderful for a guy." She enters the house and joins the conversation between Malissa and Christina about how cute they find Luke. Exiting the limo next is Bonnie who describes herself as the "chubby fashionless girl who cooks cookies with her mom... and wants to bake a pie for a man and have him be really grateful I used my wifey mom skills." Bonnie has a BMI of 30 making her borderline obese in her 5'11", 215-pound frame. At 26, Bonnie is a make up artist in Portland, Oregon, with multiple tattoos and piercings that can appear a contradiction to her desire to return to a time when "the wife is in the kitchen." As Bonnie enters the house, Amanda exits the limo. Amanda, at 5'10" tall and 235 pounds has a BMI of 33.7 classifying her as obese, is 22-year-old college student from Los Angeles. Amanda has never had a boyfriend or a Prince Charming to take her to prom. The final contestant in the first limo is Michelle, a 32-year-old photographer from Orange County who "finally loves [her]self and the weight [she] is." As her tears flow freely in her confessional, the audience is able to see her weight at 230 pounds at 5'5" making her one of the larger women competing for Luke's love with a BMI of 38.3, the first contestant who is borderline morbidly obese. As the audience heads to a commercial break, the first six women are still discussing the cuteness of Luke.

As we return from commercial break, the other two limos arrive introducing us to the fourteen women we have yet to meet. We meet Anna first, a 27-year-old plus-size model who has a BMI of 29.5 making her overweight at 6'2" tall and weighing 230 pounds. As Luke watches her enter the mansion, we are invited into her emotional confessional where she shares she has "never met anyone to love [her] for who [she is]." She points out that "love is a battlefield." Natasha exits the limo next standing at 5'9" weighing 197 pounds making her BMI 29.1. She is an overweight rocket scientist from Los Angeles who doesn't understand "why appearance is the most important thing." She asks the question that is often in the mind of larger women, "Why isn't intelligence and niceness more important than appearances?" As the audience ponders this question, Lauren, an event planner from Atlanta, Georgia, meets Luke. Lauren feels like she has waited her whole life, all 26 years, to meet Luke. At 210 pounds and 5'9" tall with an obese classifying BMI of 31, she wonders why men "want gorgeous skinny girls, not gorgeous chunky girls." As Lauren enters the mansion, Vanessa approaches Luke at 5'8" tall and 194 pounds with a BMI of 29.5 making her overweight. She asks him "What kinda girl do you like?" As he responds with "I like this kind of girl," we are taken to her confessional where she posits, "nobody looks at the kind of person you are."

Next we meet our youngest contestant, Melissa B. (she is called Mel B for the rest of the show), who exits the vehicle with a large smile. Mel B is a 21-year-old nanny in Beverly Hills who is 5'6" tall and weighs 220 pounds, making her BMI 35.5 classifying her as obese. In her confessional she breaks this researcher's heart as she confesses she has never had a date as she fears men only ask her out as jokes. As she cries, she makes

the desperate plea that she is fun! As the audience is feeling for Mel B, we meet Danielle and the sadness continues. Danielle, a 5'9", 195 pound, 25-year-old receptionist, has never had a second date. With a BMI of 28.8, she is overweight and uses that weight as protection from the outside world. We next meet Mandy, one of the smallest women vying for Luke's love. Mandy is a fitness and dance instructor from Long Beach, California, who is 5'7" weighing 180 pounds. The 25-year-old, who proudly announces that as long as you take care of yourself, you don't have to be a size four, is classified as overweight, yet looks "healthy." As Mandy enters the mansion, we are introduced to Tali, a 26-year-old Israeli who recently immigrated to the United States to follow her dream to inspire young people to accept their bodies and love them. Tali is one of the shortest contestants standing 5'4" tall, weighing 190 pounds with a BMI of 32.6 classifying her as obese. She is living her dream as a motivational speaker in New York while also doing some modeling. She is excited to prove that "love doesn't have a shape or size."

Kristian introduces herself to us with her proclamation that "West Coast girls have got the curves." We are quickly introduced to the 5'5", 225 pound fireball as she follows that announcement with the confessional that men are afraid to "love bigger girls, they love the skinny bitches." With a BMI of 37.4, this obese black woman shows her strength as we learn she is a teacher from Wallington, New Jersey. Kristian, a black woman, and Tali, an Israeli woman, are the only two participants who are marked as other than white, although the show never acknowledges race and only mentions Tali's nationality as a conduit to her religion of Judaism. No other religions or markers of otherness are mentioned. We transition to the next arrival as Kristian announces she is

proud of her “junk in the trunk.” Arianne is Luke’s oldest and lightest contestant at 37 years of age and with a BMI of 27.3 found from her 5’10”, 190-pound body. She is an entertainer from Santa Monica who confesses with tears that she still struggles with body issues. The years of self-doubt has led her to believe she is still not good enough. She fears that when she first meets a guy, “he would like one of my skinny friends” as she believes she is too fat for him. Arianne offers our first glimpse at the idea of sizism and the caste system that exists in weight. While Arianne is the smallest woman in the house, she sees herself larger due to her thinner circle of friends. As Arianne heads into the mansion, we are introduced to Sandy, a 30-year-old dancer from New York. At 5’8” and 200 pounds, it is hard to imagine her as a dancer. Her BMI of 30.4 makes her borderline obese. She finds that people are intimidated by her confidence in her size and looks forward to sharing her life with someone else. Shari is the next to depart the limo. Shari stands at 5’4” weighing 180 pounds putting her BMI in the obese zone at 30.9. As a corporate trainer in Los Angeles, she has experienced life at many different sizes. She appears the most self-conscious exiting the limo as she fidgets with her clothes. Makali is the second to last contestant we meet. As she exits the vehicle she calls Luke a “big teddy bear” and he is complimented. As they laugh together we find out that Makali is 24 years old, standing at 5’7” tall and weighing 193 pounds. Her BMI classifies her as borderline obese at 30.2. She is a teacher in Los Angeles who confesses she went out with one guy who said she “wasn’t fit enough.” As she heads inside the final and largest contestant, exits the limo. Natalia has the highest BMI at 40 classifying her 5’10”, 279-pound body as morbidly obese. She offers in her confessional a line we hear at the start of each

episode, “I don’t think love is just for skinny people. I think it is for big people too.” She is a make-up artist from Dallas, Texas, who tearfully confesses her fear of being alone for the rest of her life and her desire for someone to look past her size and love her for her.

As an audience, we have met each of the women whom Luke must choose between to find his future bride. Each woman has confessed her fears, insecurities, dating history and their hopes from Luke. Luke, our hero, now must decide whom to save and whom to set free to find her own hero. In true hero form, Luke confesses his empathy with the contestants, “I really empathize with these ladies ‘cause I know how hard it is to date being larger and feeling like you’re being left out.” Luke must now start on his heroic quest for love and saving his damsel in distress from a life of loneliness.

As Luke begins his quest, his comment is a demonstration of his power and privilege in this story. Luke sets himself up as the hero, the rescuer of his damsels from society’s prejudices toward sizist attitudes. His comment, while meant to be a sweet sentiment of his understanding of the women’s plight, is a statement of his position in the story. He sets up his relationship with these women with him as the patriarch of their destinies. He does not stop to think about how his empathy is a way of spotlighting his own issues with his size. He lacks self-reflexivity in that moment. He proliferates the sizist attitude with this statement as he asserts his power over the moment.

The Quest: The Journey of the Hero or the Narrative of Love

Our story begins in a mansion in Hollywood where our bachelor, with the assistance of his guide host, Emme, speaks of his own journey to this point and his goals for this journey. Emme is the one who, according to Campbell, gives our hero his amulets

that give him power (69). In this case the amulets are the rings he gives the ladies that they return each episode to be returned if chosen during the elimination ceremony.

After being introduced to the audience and meeting his damsels, Luke gives both the women and the audience a brief speech giving his intentions for the journey:

Look at all of you, so beautiful. I just wanted to say, I know coming here is a really big step and we've all experienced being judged or pushed aside or looked past because of our size, but I just want to let you know I think you're all gorgeous on the outside. But I have personal feelings that real love comes from the inside. So now it's just a matter of if we can make that inward connection. So what I would like to do now is to give each of you a diamond ring. Now the reason I am giving it to you is because it is my promise to each of you that I'm gonna open up my heart and accept you as you are.... There's a part in it for you. By accepting the ring from me, you're promising to do the same (Episode 1).

As he makes this speech, he again places himself in the place of power. He expresses a shared experience that is very different for him than for the women. The experience of being judged is one that fat people experience. While this phenomenon is not exclusive to men or women, it is experienced differently. Men are seen as football players or teddy bears, while women are seen as less intelligent or lazy. Luke at 330 pounds is not considered obese by appearances. He is privileged in his male body in regard to his size. He is afforded the position of confidence due to his power station in the story. He is in the position where he can ask for the promise of the women and they have little opportunity to refuse to promise.

At which point, the damsels, following the lead of our hero, promise to open their hearts and be open to love. Our hero has begun his hero quest for love and is now ready to bestow tokens of his affection on his ladies fair. The journey of courtship now begins, which Zipes defines as "the most important and exciting part of a girl's life" (*Don't Bet* 199). The energy and excitement portrayed in the hope-filled faces of our bachelorettes

show their willingness and readiness for this most important journey. As a symbol of this journey, Luke offers each woman his token, a diamond ring. As each woman approaches, we find that the imagery of the ring is not lost on her. The ring is a long time symbol of love. Diamond rings are commonly used as engagement rings. Suter and Daas define rings as “a part of the heteronormative performance of commitment” (2007). In their study of symbolism within same-sex relationships, rings were found to be a common signifier of a promise of love and declaration to both the couple as well as the outside world of the seriousness of the relationship. The rings the women are given by Luke are tokens of promises of love and the future.

Our hero and his harem of damsels mix and mingle in a cocktail party. At the end, Luke must select five women to send home from his harem to aid his process of finding the one. His journey requires him to break hearts to find his ultimate damsel. As he stands before his potential princesses, he again promises the “happily-ever-after” by stating “the future Mrs. Conley could be in this room” (Ep. 1). He then begins returning the rings that had been collected earlier to those he has deemed worthy of continuing on the journey. The first two rings distributed are to the two women from whom he received tokens of their affection in the form of kisses. As he continues to call forward the damsels, the happiness and hope begin to fade from faces to be replaced by the fear of again being rejected for reasons unbeknownst to both the women and the audience. As he bestows the last ring on Mel B, five women must take their departure from our tale. As Luke, the remaining 15 women, and the audience bid adieu to the five rejected, Michelle and Natalia are moved to tears as the leave. The other three women are seen leaving with

little said. Michelle and Natalia, our two largest bachelorettes leave disheartened and overly emotional with Natalia feeling she has lost her last attempt to find love and Michelle saying she still really wants to find love, to have that love story. Watching the two largest women leave exposes the hypocrisy of Luke's earlier empathy and promise. He is seen as a sizist as he has little at that moment to decide on anything but looks. With the time afforded during the evening's mixer, he must make choices. While some choose to stand out, the others are left at the whims of Luke's time. If it is what is on the inside that he is concerned with, he has to make this decision with a sizist paradigm.

The five rejected damsels are no longer afforded the narrative of love, at least with the hero Luke. These damsels must now begin the journey towards a new hero as the fifteen damsels left must now start the herculean feat of winning our hero's heart.

The Real Journey Begins: Dating the Hero... and his Other Damsels

Our fifteen damsels begin the journey of dating our hero. The dating occurs in both solo and group dates. Each woman covets the solo dates, yet many must experience the disappointment of group dates first. The women are split into two groups in true dodge-ball fashion with team captains picking whom they want on their team. One woman was left standing alone and was rewarded with a solo date with Luke. The disliked woman is ostracized by the good princesses and is rewarded with a solo date. The two teams would go on group dates with Luke. The first team, led by Malissa, gets the first group date on a yacht called the Dreammaker. Prior to the first date, Luke shows his hero colors again with the hopes of making the date a special one. He "wants to put the girls at ease due to their bad dating history" (Ep. 2). The hero feeds the fairy tale

mythos of the princesses being victims of their past (Zipes *Don't Bet* 194). The assumed bad dating history makes them victims of men in the past and gives Luke to power to change their ideas. He takes a little time with each woman on the date. Heather is highlighted as the damsel in distress on this date as she gets seasick and must spend the bulk of the date down below in the cabin sleeping after getting sick. Luke swoops down to check on her and spend some time with her so she feels special and beautiful. Malissa is painted as the wicked damsel by her own comments ("It's better for me that Heather is sick," "We are so glad you could join us" said while holding Luke's arm) and the comments of the other women (Kristian comments on her dislike of Malissa as Malissa did not grow up fat and has no idea what it is like to have to shop in plus-size stores in her teen years). The good versus evil begins to join the narrative at this point. Kristian's comment about Malissa sets up the premise of how weight is seen by these women. Kristian sees her life-long struggle and sees Malissa's struggle as one she has only recently begun to fight. Kristian's positions her struggle as more authentic in her performance of fatness and marginalization. She is a true fat girl in her mind as she has had the longer battle to fight with herself and society. She speaks of having to shop in plus-size stores while still in elementary school as proof of her authenticity or her right to be on the show and with Luke. Malissa's struggle for self-acceptance as a plus-size woman came after years of being thin and experiencing school and puberty as a thin woman. Her authenticity is called into play. Malissa, being cast as the evil in the story line, is seen as such due to her lack of understanding of the "true" plight of being fat; therefore not authentic. Kristian is authentic in her fatness and has been a victim of her

fatness for her entire life making her a stronger damsel in distress and inherently good. Her victimization makes her more worthy (Zipes). Lines are being drawn amongst the women who begin to see the competitive nature of this narrative.

It is during this first date with Luke that the women begin to bring up the subject of love in conjunction with Luke. During her testimonial Kristian says that Luke “loves [her] for every curve [she] has, every drop of cellulite that’s on the leg. He loves [her] for [her]” (Ep.2). Bonnie continues this theme in her testimonial where she acknowledges the competition with the understanding that the competition is for the “love of a person who loves us no matter what we look like” (Ep. 2). At this point, the audience is afforded a fuller glance at the dragon Luke must slay for his ladies, the dragon of their low self-esteem. This love they are beginning to discuss brings to light the lack of love in their own lives. It demonstrates a lack of love for self, as well as society’s lack of love for them. Their comments accepting their appearance demonstrates their own lack of acceptance and the lack of acceptance they are feeling from society at large. Love is the ultimate goal. In an interview after the show filmed, Kristian expressed how the show taught her to love herself. The love in question in the narrative may be love for self, more than love from another.

At this point the narrative starts to take stronger form. Love is found through the trials. Campbell argues that the hero must battle hegemony and the “malice of the monster” to find the other part of himself (342). Luke, to be a solid romantic hero, must overcome the challenges in his way of finding his eternal life partner. He says repeatedly he is looking for a woman who is “confident in who she is and knows what she is looking

for in a man” (Ep. 1). Our heroine must fulfill requirements to fit the glass slipper of Luke’s princess.

The second date starts with the first one-on-one date of the season. Christina, the disliked damsel by the other damsels, is swept off in the limo with Luke to be flown to Las Vegas for the evening. She is the “curvy [Luke] is into” and they begin to form a deeper connection. On this date they share the all-important first kiss of love.

The third date is yet another group date. Our damsels are faced with the fat girl fear of having to wear a swimsuit on the date. This pushes our damsels down a rapid spiral of insecurity and self-loathing, as they don’t want to be in bathing suits. Body issues take the driver’s seat on this date by the pool. Luke swoops in and saves the day by showing he is comfortable. He starts the fun and compliments the women saving them from their own insecurities. Luke again demonstrates his control of the situation. He has been afforded the power to make them feel better about themselves while still controlling the situation. While he compliments, he is in the process of selecting who stays and who goes. His power is ever present as the controlling force within the show. He bestows his affections on Mel B in particular. Mel B is on her first date ever and is sharing it with 7 other women. Luke saves her from her ideas of men only dating her because they are playing a joke on her. He grants her that ever-coveted first kiss. As the date continues, Luke perseveres to find love through the women at his disposal and wades through their insecurities and doubts. He must “sow his wild oats” to find the one he will settle down with for the American marriage dream (Dubrofsky 53).

After the three dates, our hero must once again make tough choices over which damsels he will keep and which ones he will set free to find their hero. Our damsels have begun to get competitive and start a little backstabbing to ensure they get the hero in the end. Lauren stands out as the leading shrew of gossip. She caters to Luke's fairy tale aspirations of children by pointing out the two who either don't want or can't have children. Lauren proliferates the violence of heteronormativity by exposing the women who disrupt the norms of heteronormativity by resisting patriarchal norms. The women who have submitted to heteronormativity are afforded the opportunity of marriage while those who have chosen to subvert the norms must experience rejection for their lack of feminine desires. The hero eliminates these two as well as one other who doesn't fit his fairy tale ideals. Two of the women, as they leave, celebrate the damsels left and wish them all luck while the third bemoans her crushed dream of finding Prince Charming.

The Ball (aka Second Chance Prom)

Every good fairy tale has a chance for the Hero to see his damsel(s) out of their daily rags and in a ball gown that lifts them out of their everyday situations to put them in the ultimate romance of the dance. In episode three Luke invites the ladies down to the main area to announce that he is taking them all to the prom. The assumption from Luke being they didn't go to prom in high school due to their size. He appears to be attempting to save his damsels from the bad memories of the past of proms either not attended or gone wrong by rewriting their memories. The damsels are ecstatic! As the women don their formal gowns the stories of proms gone wrong circulate in the dressing areas. When the women descend the staircase in their prom dresses, Luke stands at the bottom smiling

as his voice plays for us, the viewing audience, telling us how he is “excited to be the man who steps up to the plate and give them the prom they dreamed of.” Luke is once again positioned as the hero in the narrative who must save these women. Luke’s statement fuels the idea that for a woman to have what she has dreamed of, it must be given by a man. The assumption that these women had a negative experience at their prom demonstrates how Luke sees himself as the savior of the past of these women. He believes society has rejected these women from all romantic norms of our society. Prom is a coming-of-age experience that heteronormative teenage girls are taught to dream of having with the perfect man, the perfect dress and the perfect memory. Assumptions that these women never had this experience, or had a bad time, spotlight the otherness of their size. Not once is the idea that they may have gone and had fun is afforded to them, as their looks and their assigned place in society must have granted them a negative experience.

Once at the prom, Luke works to make all the women feel comfortable and gets them dancing. Emme, the host, appears on the stage to announce that a prom queen will be named, though not by Luke or the women, but by two members of Luke’s friendship court. Luke’s two best friends enter to spend time with Luke and the ladies to decide who is worthy of Luke and the title of prom queen. The two men seize control of the destiny of Luke’s damsels. When Danielle is named the prom queen, no one applauds the choice. Danielle is the night’s Cinderella and wins one-on-one time with Luke. All leave the prom feeling like they had a night of their dreams, even if they all didn’t win the hand of the hero at the end.

Our hero must now collect his spoils of his victory and take Danielle on their romantic one-on-one date. Danielle, the never-had-a-second-date damsel, is excited as this makes a second date for her with Luke. Luke has saved her from her first-date-only rut. Luke discovers early he cannot save Danielle from all the issues from which she needs to be saved. They discover how little they have in common as Danielle admits she doesn't like seafood, which is some of Luke's favorite food. After a romantic cruise down the river in a gondola, the two leave the date with Danielle feeling she has found her prince and Luke feeling he has not found his princess.

Luke chooses to take Heather out to make up for her being sick on their first group date. Heather and Luke arrive at their date to find they will be horseback riding. Luke saves Heather from her insecurities on horseback. Her insecurities about her size have held her back from achieving her dream of singing. Heather and Luke share their love's first kiss before heading back to the reality of eliminations.

As episode three draws to a close, Luke eliminates four more women from the possibility of being his wife. Two of the women confirm societal expectations of love by expressing their shock and disgust at being sent home before some of the larger women. Amanda takes it as a total blow to the ego that she was sent home before Mel B who is larger than she.

As with Kristian and Malissa, the levels of fatness are brought to the forefront at this point. Amanda is insulted that she is sent home before a larger girl. She sees herself as more attractive as she is smaller. Amanda says as she leaves the house, "I wonder what Luke could possibly see in Mel B. It's like a total blow to my ego. I have never lost a guy

to a girl bigger than me and not as attractive.” is showcased. The larger the woman, the more unworthy and pathetic she is. While with Kristian and Malissa, the argument is over who is more authentically fat. Here with Amanda and Mel B, the crux of the problem is who is more attractive based on size. Being smaller makes Amanda better in her eyes. With the precedent set by previous eliminations, Amanda has cause to be shocked. Luke has narrowed the field down to the smallest of the women with the exception of Mel B and Kristian. Amanda’s angst spotlights the caste system of fatness. Amanda is acceptable as she isn’t obese, just overweight. Mel B and Kristian, as obese, are less worthy of love in the eyes of Amanda. Amanda believes the rhetoric that thinner is better. With her departure, the caste system of fatness is showcased. The larger the woman, the more unworthy and pathetic she is. Amanda and her comment about Mel B show how these women believe the rhetoric that has stymied their quest of the fairy tale, fat is evil and unworthy of love and acceptance.

Good Wife v. Bad Wife: The Women Speak Out About Each Other

Fat girls are used to being judged based on their appearance. *More to Love* throws a wrench in this by having the women critique each other’s personality on who would be a good wife and bad wife for Luke. The women on the series discuss repeatedly how they are good, smart, funny people who are not given the chance to show their true beauty due to the immediate judgment of their bodies. At the moment the game arrives where they must choose the good and bad wife for Luke, their insecurity levels shift from concern over their external to concern over their internal. The winners of the best and worst wife win dates with Luke. Because the critiques are about their personality, they are seen as

more harsh and hateful than someone critiquing based on appearance. Luke puts the power of date selection in the hands of the women. Mel B sums up the fear of judgment by stating, "I'm already judged on the way I look, my weight. If people don't like my personality, that's pretty much all I have." As the game proceeds, each woman has a chance to critique each other. Kristian and Mel B end up in tears due to the words of the other women. The women who have never felt pretty enough for the fairy tale are now being critiqued that they may not be a good enough person for the fairy tale. Zipes speaks of the importance of beauty in the damsel, yet it is physical beauty that is explicated in the fairy tales. These women have relied on their personalities to show their beauty. Inner beauty is what they rely on. When their inner beauty is called into question, they begin to feel they are completely unworthy of the fairy tale. They are not good enough people for the fairy tale if they are to believe what their fellow contestants say about them. Mel B is named the worst wife and Heather is named the best wife. When Mel B is named she says the feelings she is having at that moment are the reasons she never dated. The rejection hurts.

Hero Luke has spent a great deal of the series working to save Mel B from her demons of insecurity and self-doubt. His hard work has taken a step back due to the hurt Mel B feels from the comments of the other women. Luke starts the date with the hope that Mel B will relax and be willing to have fun. Luke acknowledges quickly that he must again slay the dragon of self-esteem and does so through compliments and a fun attitude. Mel B begins to relax at the Moroccan restaurant until the belly dancers enter. Immediately the words of wicked stepsisters in the past come into play and her

insecurities return. Luke defined his princess as one that was confident. The foretelling of the end of our damsel Mel B begins and comes true by the end of the episode when she is sent home.

The best wife is given the ultimate fairy tale evening as her date. She is given a new dress, hair styling, make-up artist and taken on a princess date. She is afforded the external beauty of a princess to raise her self-esteem. The fairy tale is beginning to come true for Cinderella. She is taken from the ashes of fatness to be raised up to the status of Princess. Luke, as Prince Charming, sweeps Heather, the Princess, off to a romantic evening at a castle. He showers her with compliments, conversation, laughter, and good food. Luke, in his attempts to be Heather's hero, expresses his desire for her to see how wonderful she is in his eyes. In a perfect fairy tale, this is the point where the prince and princess ride off into the sunset as the music swells. Sadly, our fairy tale doesn't end here for our hero, Luke. He still has six women at home to have a group date with the next day at a spa.

While at the spa the wicked begins to come out again in the cattiness of the women. The wickedness is a product of the competition for a man who is willing to be with them. Luke and what Luke represents is the ultimate prize to these women. The desire to be loved is all consuming in these women, especially with their seclusion from the outside world in this context. Yet, each woman on the date expresses her desire for that one person to make her happy... her one true love. The date ends with the knowledge of the upcoming elimination.

Entering the elimination ceremony, Luke must again choose who must leave him and whom he wishes to continue to fight for love. At this point, the fairy tale ends for the worst wife, Mel B, and the ultimate villainess, Lauren, who spent her journey fighting dirty for her hero. Mel B has hope for a future fairy tale as she leaves the mansion. She knows this is not the end of her fairy tale, she thinks her fairy tale will have a happy ending.

The Sexy Six: A Shift in Focus

As the pool of damsels narrows down to the, as Luke calls them, “sexy six,” the shift of the narrative veers away from the hero needing to save our damsels from their fatness to finding his one true love among the fair maidens. Now down to the final six, the competition kicks up a notch for the fair hero’s heart. In a moment on the two-on-one date with Kristian and Mandy, Luke mentions one of the attributes of a good prince, to ensure that he “pays enough attention to his lady.” His hero-prince status goes up a little as he acknowledges the mistakes many men make in their quests for love. As he ends his “alone time” with Kristian, Mandy witnesses a kiss between her hero and the competition. Mandy turns the corner and sees Kristian’s passionate embrace with Luke. She stops, stares and heads to the bathroom with tears streaming down her face. While in the bathroom, sobs are heard. Luke knocks on the door and asks if she is okay. She says in her confessional that she is “just not feeling very special. Like a curveball comes around the corner and you’re just not expecting it. [She] almost feel[s] like he is pursuing Kristian more. [She doesn’t] want to be second best.” Luke finds a new mission on his quest for love, to heal the heartbreak just caused and to get Mandy to be open to the

possibility of love with him. He worries that “she may not have the patience” for this process. He plans to continue the pursuit and she promises to try to stay open.

The true fairy tale of the episode is his date with Malissa, complete with helicopter ride to wine tasting, with a romantic picnic, a tandem bicycle ride and time to cuddle in the vineyard. As they stroll through the vineyard, hand in hand, we see images of white horses giving the brief reminder of the fairytale being afforded these two individuals on their date. As they return, the reality of the situation comes crashing back. As the women begin to discuss their individual relationships with Luke, the insecurities come back into play. The reality that the fairy tale will only truly happen for one begins to cause more insecurity to rise to the surface.

As the final date begins, Luke realizes that the women aren’t as confident as he was hoping. He has spoken repeatedly about wanting a woman who is “sure of herself.” Luke begins to show a little frustration, by stating in his confessional that he is beginning to realize “the girls still seem really uncomfortable. They are still relying on [him] to direct the conversation.” The date caused much concern for the women, as it was a three-on-one date, again in swimsuits, this time on the beach. To break the ice, he asks the women to put sunscreen on him. He quips about the surface area they must cover of exposed flesh on his person. As Luke keeps speaking of his need for a strong confident woman, he also seems to need some saving from his own self-esteem problems. His repeated mention of his own previous esteem problems added to his desire for a self-assured woman demonstrates our hero’s struggle with his own demons. He demonstrates bravado to compensate from his own issues while the women are more expressive of their

concerns. Luke is never shown telling the women about his own self-esteem issues so the strong savior mystique is still on Luke while the women spend a great deal of their one-on-one time with Luke discussing their image issues. His bravado makes one wonder if he hopes for a confident woman to help save him from his own esteem demons. But first, he must again narrow the field down in his quest for this self-assured woman.

Our hero must deal with the reality of breaking two more hearts. He expresses how he knows by choosing, he must hurt two women about whom he cares. He does not want to devastate the women. His quest for love has become very real for him as well as the women. He shows his sensitivity to the plight of each woman there. He never loses sight that he has the power and that power seems to weigh on him at times. His noble performance of prince gets a little tarnish each time he has to let women go, especially now that he has started to care for the women. He explains to the women that he has had “some of the best dates, most romantic dates of my life. And I feel confident that I’ve made the right decision on who to continue this journey with and who just isn’t right for me.” His patriarchic power is most present as he prepares for the eliminations. The narrative focuses on his quest, his desires. He is the man who must make the tough choices and decide the fate of each woman in residence.

During the mixer, he must decide who will continue on his quest and who must leave the palace. The women begin to question their relationships as a few begin to express love for our hero. As Kristian and Heather depart from the show and the chance at Luke’s heart, Heather realizes she has been saved from her lack of confidence, even if she isn’t the one for Luke. Luke continues his hero performance by running after Kristian

to tell her he felt he wasn't the best for her; he does care for her and know she is special. Kristian falls back on her weight as a possible excuse. Luke, in true hero fashion, feels bad for hurting Kristian and Heather, yet must focus his attention on the final four still left on his quest for love in the trail of broken hearts.

The Final Four: Meet the Families

Every good fairy tale requires a moment with the families, whether it is a widowed father, wicked stepmother, or parents happily in love, the damsel's family are a part of every story. As Luke meets each family, little things come to the surface on who needs saving and who best fills the role of his damsel. With Tali, the concern of ethnicity and religion comes to the forefront and Tali's uncle, a white man married to Tali's aunt, an Israeli woman, points out to Luke the possibility of not being accepted by her family. Tali's uncle explicates to Luke that in Israel, "it becomes a bigger deal... where class and race and religion are defined and kept into areas or boxes, if you will. You discover all these issues you didn't even believe that were there. Suddenly they're there... In America it's not a big deal, but when you go back to Israel, it becomes a big deal." Luke's whiteness is called out and placed center stage against Tali's Otherness. In this situation, Luke is faced with his own race and religion (Christianity) while with the other families he is just another male. It is only with Tali that he must own his body beyond its size. His quest for self-acceptance takes a sharp turn from one of size to one of ethnicity and religion. His Christianity is as much at play as his whiteness is with Tali, whose Israeli Judaism is always at play in her life. Luke is now not only the prince with Tali, but also the White Knight. As he progresses to the other dates, his whiteness is again erased.

Mandy's parents question her maturity and expose her over-sensitive nature. Luke meets Anna's parents to find that she travels a great deal with her modeling career and is independent. Malissa's sisters expose her unwillingness to babysit making Luke question her desire for children.

The exposure of Malissa's unwillingness to babysit puts her in direct conflict with Luke's ideals for his future wife. Malissa realizes she has to do some damage control to get back in Luke's good graces in his heteronormative quest for a wife and mother for his future children. She tells Luke that she wants children of her own and looks forward to loving them. Malissa has thrown a wrench in the narrative that Luke and the myth-creator have carefully constructed. She is aware that if she does not work her way back into the narrative, she will be sent home. She makes it her mission to fit into the mold of the perfect wife for Luke and mother for their children. In confessional, she says, "I don't care to take care of other people's kids. I just told him that I would be okay with it because it could make or break his decision to keep me." Yet while talking to Luke, her story changes slightly by stating, "I love kids. I'm just not really a baby person. Like, with my own kids it's gonna be... they're my own kids." Luke is skeptical if she is telling the truth, stating "it is easy to say something and harder to do it."

During the dates, the competitive nature of the women begins to appear with Malissa cast as the wicked stepsister again this time. Malissa pushes and questions Mandy's connection prior to her date, pushing Mandy to the point of tears. Upon returning from her date with Luke, she tells the girls of Luke asking her sisters how they would feel if he proposed to Malissa. The girls are crestfallen. It causes more insecurity

within Mandy. During the mixer, Malissa tells Anna that they are the two who are best suited for Luke. During the elimination ceremony, Malissa wants to know which of the other three women is going on with her so she knows how to maneuver the situation to a victory for herself.

As he says his farewell, breaking Anna's heart, he now has the three damsels, releasing the most independent of the group, the one least willing to sacrifice or change. Putting Anna in the dreaded friend zone, she leaves us feeling as if she was afforded the possibility to be comfortable in her skin. As we leave the episode, the three damsels find out they are heading to Hawaii.

Journey to Paradise: The Hero and His Three Damsels Head to Hawaii!

What would a fairy tale be without a fairy tale-esque location? Luke, Malissa, Tali and Mandy head to Hawaii for the exotic locale dates. The myth-creator, Mike Fleiss, sets the stage for romance in the tropical fairy land known for its lovely beaches, stunning blue-green water and its picturesque settings. As Luke goes on solo dates with each woman, he begins to expose his softer, less secure side. With Malissa he fears she has the control in the relationship as she holds the most power to hurt him. With Tali he exposes her to her greatest fear of the ocean and makes her feel safe with him as she ventures in and faces her fear. Tali feels that Luke "shows his real character taking care of the situation, taking care of [Tali]." His date with Mandy shows how guarded she still is and the least secure in their connection. The conversations shown between the two seem stilted and full of awkward pauses. Mandy admits in confessional as the two are kissing on a boat: "I don't fear love, I fear rejection." The dates all end in Luke's suite as

each woman has the choice to stay the night with him. Each woman agrees to the alone time with Luke. While the audience is not privy to all that occurs in the room, the myth creator gives us music that is reminiscent of music in pornographic movies to insinuate what is occurring in the room. At this point in the fairy tale, Luke has the difficult choice between Malissa, the one with the power; Tali, the one he feels encompassed by, yet, has the most difficult situation to overcome in terms of differences in culture and religion; and Mandy, the most guarded and insecure in most need of saving from herself. At elimination, we find a brokenhearted Mandy being sent from paradise back to her real life as Luke has not chosen her to continue on to meet his family.

The Finale! Love Wins Out!

The final episode of the show brings our fairy tale to a close. Luke returns to his hometown and into the assumed reality of his everyday life. While the journey has been wrought with emotion and dragon fighting, the hero and his damsels must face two more challenges: meeting Luke's dad, brother and grandmother; and meeting Luke's mom. (Luke's parents are divorced so they must be met on separate occasions.)² The first to face the hero's family is Tali. In preparation for the meeting, Luke addresses the concern of his family being devout Christian and Tali being Jewish. As they sit on the picnic blanket sharing a meal in the park, Luke tells Tali, "I didn't want to make you nervous about it. I don't think they will totally grill you about it, but at the same time, you should be prepared and know that those questions will come up.... It is natural, it is just a part of life to be concerned about those things. But I don't think that it would cause him (Luke's

² The cause or reason for the divorce is never discussed during the series. This divorce is accepted as a normal thing and is never addressed as meaning more than just a fact of his life.

father) not to like you or not approve of you because of that. But justta, hey you guys need to be aware of that.” He continually expresses his hope to the audience in confessional that his family is open-minded to her and her religion: “They’re definitely gonna have questions about her background, the fact that Tali is Jewish that my family is all devout Christians and they’re gonna probably have some concerns about that, about us being together.” Luke’s dad is immediately concerned about the differences in religion and culture. In a family discussion, he asks, “As far as being Israeli, how do you feel about Christianity?” Tali responds by stating that “Religion is religion and for me it is more important for someone to have faith in something. I’m Jewish and he’s Christian and we’re going to have to work it.” Luke’s dad continues, “Usually there’s a conflict of interest on how the children are going to be raised. And that’s very, very important to me. Have you guys discussed that matter?” Tali responds with a desire for both to be taught so both heritages can be respected. Dad continues, “But I know that it has caused great conflict, so to speak, in some families. No one wants it, but it happens.” At this point, the hero must face the dragon of difference for the second time during the journey. Luke faces his father down and steps in to defend his lady fair and their love. He tells his father, “I feel like, um, ultimately we believe in the same God. It’s not something that would stop me from wanting to continue forward with Tali. You know, she’s open to our children getting to know my beliefs and I would be open to them getting to know hers.” He continues in his confessional showing his willingness to save her in that moment: “When the questioning in the living room started becoming more and more focused on, um, the fact that Tali is Jewish and that I’m Christian and how the children will be raised.

At a certain point, I stepped in and tried to direct conversation and help Tali, ‘cause I feel like I wanted to offer my perspective so that she didn’t feel like she had to field all of those questions by herself.” Dad continues to shine light on the differences between them by stating, “Being Jewish and being Christian, there’s going to have some hurdles to jump.” His dad shines a light on an issue that Luke and Tali both feel they can overcome and handle together. The oppression of Tali’s intersected identity is spotlighted in this moment. Tali responds to the concerns by stating, “Yeah, I think it’s educating them that and proving them that two cultures can come together, two different religions can come together and live in peace and create harmony. I think it is just going to make us stronger.” While Tali is an accomplished and beautiful woman, his father only sees her religion and nationality.

When Luke’s family meets Malissa, they are smitten. It is clear that Luke’s dad much prefers the “fairer” maiden and tells Luke that Malissa is the better choice for him (“Whoever you decide is gonna be the one for you in your life, it needs to be someone like Malissa.”) Luke, as the hero accepts this concern and tells his dad that it isn’t up to him. It is Luke’s decision. In the moment of confession, Luke confesses his concern that Malissa is on the show to win, not for love.

As we return to the mansion, the remaining two damsels are surprised, while still in pajamas, with Luke’s mom who decided to visit and meet the ladies. Immediately Malissa and Tali are nervous. We hear over voice-over that Luke’s mom is the most important person in his life. Malissa and Tali fight for approval of the matriarch of Luke’s life. During this encounter Luke’s mom asks the women why they came on the

show. Malissa is painted by her answer as doing it for the competition: “For me I did it on a whim. You know everything just happened so fast. I got caught up in the excitement. Ultimately I did it for the experience.” Again she is being cast as the wicked one, while Tali is painted as the one who went on to show fat girls everywhere that they can have love: “Well for me coming on this was a really good opportunity, besides, you know, finding love but is showing people that love comes in all shapes and sizes. I have always been, you know, big. It is very important to me to put that message out that there is love for everybody and um, people should just respect you for who you are.” At the end of the visit, Luke and his mom discuss the two women with Luke’s mom giving her vote to Tali. The hero’s decision has become more difficult with the split in the family’s opinions and choice. Luke must now choose and finish this part of the journey alone, the courtship with a future Mrs. Conley.

As the two women prepare for the final moments of the show, the two are given the royal treatment in preparation. During this time the audience is invited into their excitement and fears of what is to come. Luke must choose between the relaxed carefree Malissa and the inspiring, stubborn Tali. Each woman attributes their newfound confidence to our hero who has saved them from their self-esteem dragons.

As the series draws to a close, Luke must tell the one he has not chosen that he has found the fairy tale with another. As the limo arrives, the audience watches Malissa get out and approach Luke. Malissa is told the sad news that he has stronger feelings for Tali and must let Malissa go. Malissa leaves heartbroken, confused and angry about Luke’s choice. As we see the second limo approach we hear Luke’s inner thoughts

through voice-over of his love for Tali and hopes for their future. As Tali approaches Luke the hero's role changes hands from Luke saving the damsel to the damsel saving Luke. Throughout the tale Luke has had the control over the destiny of his harem of women within the context of the show and relationships. At the moment Tali walks toward Luke, he must make his plea that she now chooses him. His plea is as follows:

I know life has made it difficult for people like you and I to find love. Over time I've been able to watch your confidence grow. You are such a beautiful, curvy woman. The more time we've spent with each other, it has become clear that we are from two different worlds and if we were to get together we're gonna have obstacles to overcome. And in the beginning I made a promise to love you for who you are. And I do. I love you with all my heart. And you have honored your promise to me to love me for who I am, as I am. You make me a better man. So something I want to ask you... (drops to one knee) I want you to be my wife. Will you marry me? (Ep. 8)

His plea is fraught with his resolution to be the prince and to demonstrate his power throughout his quest. Tali started this quest as a model, yet Luke feels her confidence has grown. She repeatedly commented on her need to lower her walls. What was perceived as a lack of confidence may have been her innate protectiveness of her heart. Luke sees her opening up as his influence over her esteem. He takes ownership of her confidence as something only he, a good man, could bring out in her. He also sees the differences they share as obstacles that they can "overcome." As he expresses after meeting Tali's aunt and uncle, "I'm concerned that her family wouldn't approve of me" (Ep. 6). On their one-on-one date in episode seven, he says in confession, "Tali is not the easy choice at all. We're from two completely different worlds, completely different backgrounds. But I have feelings for Tali that I have never had for any other woman." With his father, he steps in and defends by stating, "I feel like, um, ultimately we believe in the same God. It's not something that would stop me from wanting to continue forward with Tali." (Ep.

8). The differences he speaks of are their differing religions and ethnicities. He has only recently through Tali been brought aware of his whiteness. She has always been aware of her race and religion. He codes what she has lived and experiences as “obstacles to overcome” again exhibiting his privilege in life and this quest. His choice to code her religion and nationality as obstacles further normalizes his beliefs and ethnicity. The only time he owns that his religion is part of the obstacles was with his father as he felt the need to defend his choice of Tali, it was a defense of his choices. In the final speech as he addresses the obstacles, he never clearly states what the obstacles are which further spotlights their existence. Coding the differences as obstacles makes them another battle to be fought to heteronormatize the couple as he did with fatness.

As our damsel accepts his hand and ring in marriage proposal, the fairy tale ends with confessions of love and long kisses. They now ride off into the sunset happy and in love. The mythic narrative of love rarely takes us beyond this point to the actual nuptials or married life. The engagement is the end of their fairy tale journey. Our hero has saved the damsel from her life as she puts it: “I am the happiest girl on earth right now. I am the kinda girl who gave up on love, was always put down for my weight, never heard the word I love you back. I couldn’t ask for a better end. Dreams do come true” (Ep. 8). The two have saved each other from loneliness, from the solitude life that is often assumed for fat people. The fairy tale is complete for these two. Nineteen broken hearts line the path toward their happily-ever-after.

The fairy tale is now complete. The legions of fat people in the world now have a representation of the story applying to them. Happily-ever-after has been achieved

between Luke, an obese man and Tali, an obese woman. Our hero has fulfilled his mission. “The adventure of the hero normally follows the pattern of the nuclear unit [as] described: a separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power, and a life-enhancing return” (Campbell 35). His mission is complete. He has left his world, gone to Hollywood, met women to penetrate his heart and earn his love, and must now return to his world, with a new fiancée in tow.

Chapter 5:

Love Through a Prism Lens: Feminism and Fatness in *More to Love*

If you like it then you should have put a ring on it –Beyonce

The beauty myth is not about women at all. It is about men's institutions and institutional power. –Wolf

If she's got a round behind, she's a friend of mine. –Luke Conley

Luke and Tali found their fairy tale ending on *More to Love*. Throughout the fairy tale journey, Luke had to slay the dragon of body issues within the women while also having control over the destiny of the twenty women's love lives. Feminists have done extensive research into the ideas of the female body through the lens feminism. Susan Bordo examines how the female body is performed within our culture surrounding weight and size. She argues that value is assigned to bodies based on their performance (57). The ability for females to perform the expected role of women in society is judged and deemed worthy or unworthy of positive evaluation. Bordo brings forth arguments that

when the body-performing woman is larger she is seen as less worthy than those that fit society's ideals of worth.

Intersectionality, as defined by hooks, Crenshaw, and Hill Collins, is a way of looking at the body as a place of identity intersection. Hill Collins, Crenshaw, and hooks look at a person as more than one identity. The collection of identities makes up the person, with all the identities intersecting in the body. As identities have different worth based on societal expectations of worthy, identities are often marginalized based on the acceptability of the identity. All identities meet in the body where the marginalized identity is usually the one that is seen dominating the other identities. Marginalized identities are usually defined by their difference. Commonly recognized spaces of marginality include race, sexuality, gender, ethnicity, physical ability and religion. Fatness is seen as a limit on physical ability and in complete control of the fat person. Fatness is marginalized and moralized within the context of oppression of the body. Each person on the show, both male and female, discusses the judgments, oppression and limits put on their bodies due to size. The women, many through tears, discuss the oppression of their bodies and the lack of availability of love due to their size. The show not only demonstrates the oppression of the female form, but also affords equitability as the bachelor - or as many Internet bloggers call him the Fatchelor - is equally overweight. As Kavka points out, "it is worth remembering that the social gaze is just as engaged in making aesthetic discriminations; not all lovers must be beautiful, but they should be more or less in the same 'league'" (115). The dating scene can be perceived as more acceptable as it isn't one Greek god-like man with heavy women, but he is also

“average.” The intersection of identity surrounding physical ability based on size is spotlighted on the bachelor as well as the women.

As fat women are marginalized for size first, the other identity markers are also weakened or generally remain unmarked. As straight, mostly white women, their presence on the show is not unusual. The success, or lack thereof, of the show is reliant on society’s acceptance of fatness.

The show’s focus on one identity marker works to erase the other markers. With the exception of conversations surrounding Tali’s Judaism, race, religion, ethnicity and cultural heritage are not discussed. While other contestants appear to be “non-white,” this is never acknowledged on the show or in the promotional materials. Three identity markers appear to be the only one acknowledged: sex as female, sexual orientation as heterosexual, and physical ability as overweight or obese. All else that makes up these women is rarely shown as being discussed. This erasure of race offers an assumption that all the women are offered the same opportunities (Dubrofsky, *The Bachelor*, 44). By removing race and ethnicity, a stronger spotlight is placed on the weight of each woman. Acknowledging race opens up the conversation to include cultural norms outside the mainstream white culture where curves are deemed unworthy of acceptance and love. The conversations, until the final four contestants, revolve around size and how that has impacted their lives and dreams. The audience is afforded little information about these women. Which begs the question, how does this value assessment of the worthy versus unworthy in the game of love play out on *More to Love*?

The myth of love or the fairy tale myth has been accused of undermining feminism (Kuykendal and Sturm). With the stereotypical traditional gender roles portrayed and proliferated in fairy tales, young people are being taught from a very early age what is expected from men and women when it comes to romance. The narrative sold on *More to Love* is one that claims to offer a challenge to the norm, while only making the traditional ideals open to a larger crowd. To fully understand the implications of reality competition dating shows like *More to Love*, one needs to look at the implications of the show on women and women's bodies. To best understand these implications, the show's set up, the symbolism, the power structure, the representation of emotion, the gender roles personified, and the disposability of the body will be analyzed through the lens of feminism and intersectionality.

Seeing Red: The Show's Opening

As the first episode of *More to Love* starts the screen is black with the message "*The average woman on a dating show...Size 2*" with images of thin women in nice dresses entering the mansion and bikinis descending into a pool. The images are of their white bodies; faces are not shown. The white thin bodies are the focal point. The female body is objectified the moment the show begins. As the introduction continues, the audience is given the message "*The average American woman.... Size 14.*" The voice-overs begin explaining the desires of the contestants on *More to Love*: "I don't think love is just for skinny people. It's for big people too" (Natalia). "I've never met anyone who could just love me for who I was" (Anna). The first ten seconds of the introduction to the show sets up the entire show in a way that both objectifies and celebrates thinness while

objectifying and weakening fatness, maintaining a status quo of fat as bad. The thin women in the opener are active, shown in motion, while the fat women are shown sitting in their bathing suit in a hot tub or sitting on a couch with drink in hand as if they were awaiting their romantic destiny to come to them instead of being active in their own lives. As the introduction continues, a promise for change is made about the content of the dating show. The change extolled is about the size of the participants, not the set up of the show. The show will continue to give one power over many. The straight white bachelor will decide who is afforded a future and who is not.

The opening sequence continues with images from the show and what is to come. Every comment made during the opening sequence has to do with weight and the inaccessibility of love for fat people. Tears are seen and heard throughout the opening sequence. The producers, in an effort to show that this is a different type of dating show, edit the opening to be a minute of comments including the following:

“It’s time to show America that plus-size women could do it too.” (Makali)

“When I think about Luke, he’s just a sigh of relief because I know there is a guy out there who will appreciate me for who I am.” (Malissa)

“It’s hard to find someone who loves you inside and out.” (Heather)

“I just want people to love me for me.” (Mel B)

“My first time in a bathing suit in front of a guy I like. I just don’t know what to do.” (Mel B)

“I’ve been that girl that’s not part of the group.” (Anna)

“It’s intimidating especially as plus-sized women.” (Lauren)

“I want someone that’s gonna, that will, like, not be embarrassed to be with me.”

(Mel B)

“I’ve been pushed aside by men my whole entire life. I finally found a guy that cares about me.” (Kristian)

Each comment expresses hurt, rejection, fear, and hope for love. The choice of these quotes set up the series as one that is not as much about finding love as it is about showing the women’s struggle to fit a norm and trying to find someone who will accept them outside the norm. The opening sequence also sets Luke, the bachelor, up as the hero of these women’s dreams by saying the following: “It’s my promise to each of you that I’m gonna open up my heart and accept you for who you are.” “Voluptuous curvy women. That’s always been my thing.” He has a harem of women that fit his desires and he gets his pick of the group. The fate and future of the women is in Luke’s hands. Sadly our hero gets a bit of tarnish on him as the weeks progress and he slowly eliminates the largest of the women and keeps the final four as the smallest women, the ones who weigh the least.

The size of the women and their struggle for not only the love of a man, but also the love and acceptance of self, is the premise set up by the opening. Weight takes on an Albatross symbolism of being the main identifier of the women. As the Fox website tells us, the premise of the show is for a “brawny prince searching for one curvy Cinderella to take on the romantic adventure of a lifetime.” Size is paramount. Even Luke’s size is pertinent to the story line. He is portrayed through both the Fox website and his own testimonials as an example of hegemonic masculinity, so therefore the only acceptable fat

person on the show. Hegemonic masculinity as defined by Trujillo as a man who personifies physical strength, occupational achievement, patriarchy, outdoorsman, and heterosexual (290-291). Luke portrays all of those in the opening sequence establishing his masculine portrayal as one of acceptability as the bachelor. His size is acceptable as his masculinity is acceptable. He is a large prince. His size is the only acceptable one. The show is set up to focus on size, acceptable or unacceptable, in all it does, from the title of the show to the tokens of affection given to each woman for the chance to remain competing.

Are You Going to Eat That Orange?: Symbolism and Size

Symbols have communicative meaning derived from the culture where the symbol is being used (Duck). Simple objects are made complex with the symbolism attached to them. For example, items as simple as coal on December 25th means you have been a bad child that year, red roses on a date mean this person has strong feelings, or a vacuum-cleaner as a gift can be interpreted as a sign that one does not keep a clean house. Campbell refers to symbolism as “vehicles of communication” (58). Seeing symbols as vehicles of communication illustrates how symbols are used to move communication forward. Some symbols are universally accepted, while others are very group specific. In *More to Love*, the symbolism seemed to go beyond the standard accepted meanings to be also ways of further bringing attention to the size of the body. The main symbols were the rings, the prom dresses and food.

It is a long-standing tradition that rings have symbolic meaning attached to them. Whether it is a class ring showing loyalty to a school, a competition award showing

victory over all others, or the most noticeable, the ring of promise, such as an engagement ring or wedding ring. *More to Love*'s choice to use rings as the symbol of continuation and promise is the first time rings have been used as the continuing prize, not the end goal. As each woman on the first day is given a ring, the right sized ring must be given to each person. The size of the ring is another space where the producers demonstrate the show's desire to focus on the size of the participants. Roses know no size and fit all. In the rose ceremonies of *The Bachelor*, the size 2 women need not worry about if the rose will fit them, as they are held and do not encircle the women. Each ring had to be sized to each woman. During one elimination ceremony when Mel B is given her ring, she worries as she walks to Luke that the ring won't fit and he had made a mistake. Each woman's ring is specifically hers, which makes each unique, yet the only difference is the size. The rings are worn on the right ring finger instead of the left until the proposal at the end. On *The Bachelor*, the roses are given freely and for the keepsake of the women. With the rings, they must give them up each week. They have to own a piece of their rejection by giving the rings back to Luke. Luke can return the rings or keep them, which can be interpreted as what Luke gives; he also has the power to take it back. These rings are not just signs of acceptance but are also the signs of a promise for the future. The rings symbolize hope, dreams, desires, promises, and fairy tales. Rejection by loss of the ring symbolizes more than just rejection, but the loss of the hopes, dreams, desires, promises, and fairy tales. Each time they take the ring off to put it in the bowl for Emme to take to Luke, they are being forced into an active role in their rejection. Nothing is given freely to these women.

The roundness of the ring is another time where shape is the focus. These women are curvy, no straight long stem roses for these curvy women. They are given the curved ring that encircles their fingers. In the title frame of the show, the ring encircles the title of the show offering the image of roundness as the premise of the show. The ring is more than a symbol of promise; it is a representation of the women. It is a marker on them between elimination ceremonies. As the roses are left in their rooms on *The Bachelor*, the rings are worn constantly as a constant reminder, a physical marker of choice that can be just as easily given as taken away. The rings are promises of a future until taken away.

Promise rings are becoming more commonplace in our society. Some are promises of future relationships, others are promises to stay pure until marriage, others have meanings specific to the ring. Luke's promise with the rings is to accept the women as they are and love them for themselves. As the rings are signs of size, they are also signs of acceptance and a fulfillment of Luke's promise. Once Luke decides to no longer uphold his promise with a woman, the ring is taken and not returned.

As each of the women had a dream of the diamond ring, an earlier dream comes first: the dream of the perfect prom with the perfect prince. In episode three Luke takes the women to a second chance prom. After he calls them down, he offers the dresses in the boxes for the women. Immediately the fight is on for the perfect fit with the perfect cut and coloring. Bonnie is asked if she can breathe in the dress she has chosen and says, no, but who needs to breathe? The sacrifice for oxygen for the perfect dress is seen repeatedly. As each woman tells the stories of their failed or absent proms, they are put in their dresses with varying degrees of oxygen available. Tali discusses how she was never

afforded a prom, while Lauren speaks of her older boyfriend at the time thinking prom was unimportant. Kristian, through tears, talks about having to get photos with her friend's date while Mel B talks of how she never went due to her lack of a date as well as her insecurity going alone. These women are afforded this experience thanks to the man they all hope will choose them at the end of the process. The prom is filled with dancing and joy, another symbol of normalcy in a woman's growth. The dress and the evening are symbols of what a woman is supposed to experience to be seen as having fully lived.

To fully live on the dating shows means you are not to be seen eating. On most dating shows, the only time you see food is on dates. Rarely is the audience afforded seeing the contestants actually consume the food, unless the man is feeding it to them as a romantic gesture of shared pleasure. In these shows food becomes an aphrodisiac, coded in sexual desires and meaning. Women in shows like *The Bachelor* spend a great deal of time drinking, but not eating. The kitchen is a source of catty conversations and fights, not of cooking and eating. In shows like *Flavor of Love* women are also seen in the kitchen in competitions where they must cook the bachelor's favorite dishes. However, many of the episodes of *More to Love* started in the kitchen with the women eating frozen waffles, bagels with peanut butter and bananas, and conversations about their favorite foods and ability to cook.

Many conversations surround food. When a group of women were left behind during a date, they cooked Luke cupcakes stating the way to a man's heart is through his stomach. In the series premiere we see Bonnie, after confessing to her desire to show off her wifey-mom skills in the kitchen and her desire to get to Luke's heart through his

penis and his stomach, eating a skewer of meat and discussing her love for meat on a skewer. The ever-present food is a constant reminder of the women's inability to control their desire for food. Food is the controlling factor. Bonnie's love for the meat skewer with her previous statement of love being through the penis and stomach offers the idea that food and love are the same thing. The phallic nature of the meat skewer with her obvious pleasure with food is as sexually gratifying as sex with Luke would be. The women are shown spending more time with food than with Luke. Food is equated with Luke. They are in relationships with food as much as a quest for love. The relationship with food can be perceived as a substitute for a relationship with a man. The relationship with food increases their weight so continues the need for the love affair. If they don't win the man's heart, they still have their love affair with food. The "vice" of alcohol is secondary to the love of food. Fetishism is attached to the relationship with food. Eating is as pleasurable as sex or love. As with the meat skewer, a later episode gives us the following example of food as sex.

On a one-on-one date with Luke, Danielle lets Luke know she doesn't like seafood and Luke had expressed previously his hope for the two to enjoy some of his favorite foods. At that point the date, which wasn't going well before, stutters to a near stop with an awkward moment of silence. Later in the date, the audience is privy to Danielle eating a banana dipped in chocolate and covered in nuts. The eating of the banana bordered on pornographic between the moaning, the phallic nature of the banana and how she was eating it. The love story of the date shifts from Luke and Danielle to Danielle and the banana. The date itself is a failure and Danielle goes home at the end of

the episode, however she has her love affair with food to fall back on as she leaves. Her pleasure of food is not seen as normal. She struggles to communicate effectively with Luke and leaves Luke feeling a lack of emotional connection. She and Luke do not have food likes in common, yet she has a connection with dessert. Sex is often referred to as “dessert” in colloquial terms. Her evident pleasure with the banana and his evident discomfort with her offers the audience a glimpse at the interchangeability of food and man in the life of this one fat girl.

On dates the women discuss how nice it is to be able to eat whatever they want and Luke doesn’t care about their size and wants them to be themselves. At the spa on a group date, all the women discuss their enjoyment of food and question Luke of his pleasure of eating. The love story of the show fluctuates between the ladies’ love for Luke and for food. While alcohol does flow freely as on other dating shows, food is rarely shown on the other shows. On *More to Love*, it takes a center stage role. As with Danielle, food and a relationship with a man seem interchangeable. It also offers evidence as to why these women are alone in the first place. Luke’s mission to find love in a confident “average” size woman is competing with the women’s lack of control with food and the sensual relationship the women have with food. On *The Bachelor*, alcohol flows freely and the women are seen partaking in Champagne (a classy drink) or wine (a sophisticated drink). Rarely do you see them drink to excess (that phenomenon is usually found on VH1 reality competition dating shows). Alcohol is shown as a sign of sophistication, not a vice or a needed commodity. On *More to Love*, food is shown as a needed commodity as well as an addiction and source of comfort for the women. The

ever-present food is a constant reminder of what caused these women to be “more to love.” They are seen eating and relaxing, being gluttons. Their obsession with food goes beyond what is needed to survive to an overwhelming presence in their life to the point of addiction. In every episode, conversations around food are found. Whether discussing their breakfast choices, the sense of freedom feeling comfortable eating in front of Luke, or their ability or inability to cook, the relationship with food is a prevalent one. Geneen Roth, in her book *Women, Food and God*, explores the idea that “the way you eat is inseparable from your core beliefs about being alive. Your relationship with food is an exact mirror of your feelings about love, fear, anger, meaning, transformation and, yes, even God” (Inside flap). The liberation to eat was portrayed as of equal importance to the feelings the women develop for Luke.

Follow the Yellow Brick Road: Power Dynamics & Disposability of the Body

Reality competition dating shows have created a skewed power dynamic in favor of the bachelor. The bachelor decides the value and worth of the contestants. Throughout the course of the show, the bachelor decides who is worthy and who isn't based on the criteria of his choosing. Additionally, the bachelor is positioned as the “ideal man” both in the first episode of the show, as well as through the constant reinforcement of the women throughout the series. Because, he is “the perfect catch” women are willing to share his time with others in hopes that in the end her fairy tale will be granted and he will choose her.

Kavka writes of the polygamist aspects of reality competition dating show looking at how polygamy, in these shows, leads to monogamy so is socially acceptable.

The end result being engagement to one person “give(s) sanction to the reality of love by demarcating singular romantic possession.... A trajectory which reflects the ideal romantic narrative in popular culture” (Kavka 114). The polygamy is only afforded to the bachelor as was proven on Jake’s season of *The Bachelor* when a contestant was sent home for an inappropriate relationship with a member of the crew. The women are not afforded the possibility of dating multiple men unless cast on *The Bachelorette*, the female equivalent of the show. Luke, as the bachelor has all the power regarding the future of the women. His choices are the ones that truly matter. The women do have the power to reject the bachelor by choosing to not accept the token of affection, in this case the ring. If a woman would not accept the token of affection, this would appear to be unusual and socially unacceptable. Frank posits monogamy as a fetish and the harem mentality of reality competition dating shows are a more honest depiction of love with the harem than the idea of only wanting one sexual partner for the rest of one’s life (114). The harem discusses their trust issues with the man whose responsibility is to date all of them. He is cheating, yet honest about it as it is the nature of the beast. They address repeatedly their concerns of being “cheated on” while living with the women who are also dating their man. As Dubrofsky extols:

The bachelor is the Sheik of this realm, the white playboy who has arrived in a dark land to frolic before returning to more serious ventures and to his white leading lady. On the road to finding a mate, the bachelor has numerous opportunities for lusty forays with many women who await the pleasure of being conquered by him. (48)

The women are ladies in waiting for their time with their man. This is the price they must pay for an “authentic” relationship with their dream man. They live in a house with no televisions, radios, computers, or phones to distract them from the reality of the moment

or from the women the man is dating. The single women are put in a situation where every minute of the twenty eight days they are taping the show is about the man who has the power and is the “chosen one.” They must put forth the best image of self at all times to ensure they are chosen.

The Bachelor reflects traditional social attitudes toward men as sexual predators, as the star is encouraged to be sexually active and is rewarded for his behavior.... Shows such as *The Bachelor* and *Joe Millionaire* construct negative representations of single women, as it is the job of the single man to find the one honest woman amongst many dishonest women. (Hill 119-20)

With Luke holding the power, the women must always look put together, look happy, and sell themselves to be “The One.”

The women must also walk a line in terms of negotiating their sexuality. Being sexual while still being the good girl – this itself is part of the myth. Consider the woman on *Joe Millionaire* who was accused of giving him oral sex on camera and how she was framed. She was vilified in the press and will forever be known for this, though she denies anything happened. It is not until episode seven that the women begin to express more than kissing. Each of the final three were invited to spend the night with Luke after their respective dates. Malissa confesses “Definitely there is a lot of physical attraction and sexual tension there, I guess you could say.” As the date ends for the audience, we see Malissa and Luke snuggling on the bed kissing, fully clothed, as the music swells. With Tali, she responds with shock when he invites her up to his room and admits to not bringing her pajamas. Tali confesses, “I did not expect any of this. It just shows how surprising life can be. I’m so falling in love with this dude.” Her reaction is more of love than Malissa’s sexual tension. For Tali it was an example of her comfort and love level for Luke. “I’m not gonna even think about what I do and don’t do. I’m just going to go

with it” (Tali). The music swells ending the viewing of the date with the two kissing in the tub dressed in their swimsuits. With Mandy, the request to spend the evening together happens on a boat with a mattress set up for them on the deck. The outdoor display removes some of the privacy afforded to Tali and Malissa in his room. Mandy confesses that “Luke is becoming my lover.... I’m in love with him.” Of the three, Mandy is the only one who specifically states her desire for Luke to be her lover. Malissa addresses the sexual tension, Tali addresses the comfort level of the two and Mandy addresses her desire for Luke to be her lover, a combination of both the sexual tension and comfort level.

The women’s fate rests in the hands of the man who has promised to get to know each of them and love them for who they are (or as much as he can know who they are in the 28 days during which the show is taped). Luke talks of how beauty is confidence. He is looking for beauty in the women. The women are judged initially based on their appearance as they depart the limos to meet Luke. He must eliminate five women the first night and does so based mostly on appearance. On a show that makes claims to help “average women” find love, the first five eliminated include the two largest women of the series, Natalia and Michelle. Both women are borderline morbidly obese. Of the other three women eliminated that first week, two are obese and one is overweight. The overweight one, Natasha, is a rocket scientist and is portrayed as socially awkward. As each week progresses, all women with obese BMIs but one, Tali, are eliminated. Tali continues on to win Luke’s heart. Her obese BMI is due mostly to her height (5’4”), not

her weight (190lbs). Being shorter than most of the women, her height pushes her rather small frame, in comparison, into the obese range.

As Luke eliminates the largest of women, the idea of the disposability of fat people is proliferated. Many blame personal responsibility for the reason for fatness. When fast food lawsuits were occurring, the outcry was for the plaintiffs to take responsibility for their actions, not for the fast food restaurants to change their methods. Thomson looks at the representation of fatness through the idea of personal responsibility. Through her findings, she argues that the restaurant organizations were given no culpability in the obesity epidemic. The pressure still lies on the person to take responsibility. In her study of the ads for weight loss, Thomson found what she calls “spectacular decapitations,” where the before pictures on weight loss ads show headless fat bodies. Through this metaphoric execution, the body of the fat person is removed of identity and emotion. This removal is to take humanity away from humans.

This removal of humanity is similar to the idea of disposable people. Due to a person’s race, economic, and social class, a person’s status and worth are assessed. According to Giroux, disposable people are “an unnecessary burden on state coffers and consigned to fend for themselves” in a democracy that is withering to lay “bare the racial and class fault lines” (307). While Giroux found the victims of Hurricane Katrina to be seen as disposable, a similar argument can be made about fat people. The health experts and diet ads rarely specify which is to be lost, the person or the weight. By claiming to find a new you, this can be read to mean that the you that exists today is disposable and subpar. As with Luke, the ones in power have no set responsibility to disclose why the

ones who are disposed are being disposed. In episode six, the audience is afforded the first glimpse into why he ejects Anna from the show. In the confessional after letting Anna go, he admits that she is more of a friend than a romantic partner. He tells Anna he doesn't feel she is ready for a relationship. He is accountable to Anna and the audience in this rejection.

Luke proliferates this idea of disposability as he eliminates the largest women so his final four are the smallest of the group. As diet ads condemn the person as well as the fat, *More to Love* condemns the whole person. His promise to get to know each woman is a fairly empty promise, which is how the show is set up. With the demand to eliminate the majority of the women in the first twenty days of filming, the question is how can he claim to get to know any of the women to find who is the honest, good choice and who is physically attractive. The fattest of the women have no chance to show Luke who they are as they have only a few short hours, while competing with the other women present, to show Luke who they are, outside of just a large body. The first episode sees the two largest women and the second sees the two oldest women evicted. The fattest women can be seen as being ejected due to size, while the two oldest due to their lack of willingness to procreate, thus failing to fulfill the fairy tale. The woman's body is seen as needing to be below a certain size and willing to fulfill their duty to bear children. Yep refers to this phenomenon as the violence of heteronormativity. As Yep defines, women are subject to patriarchic violence to fit certain feminine norms to be accepted in heteronormative relationships. As the weeks progress, the women are narrowed down to the most narrow. As Luke gets down to the slimmest group, he cuts the one whose job is most established

and needing of the most time away from home. Again the willingness to bear children is raised. When Luke removes Heather from the house, she had just admitted she wasn't sure about staying home to rear children. Her inability to fulfill traditional gender norms makes her disposable. The women are disposed, and due to the lack of ratings for the show, seem to disappear back to their normal life with no consideration for their stories to be told. They do not fulfill the fairy tale and heteronormative drive of the show.

The show maintains this drive by refusing to do a reunion show. One of the capstones of *The Bachelor* series is the "Women tell all" episode and the "After the final rose" shows which did not exist for *More to Love*. The women were never given a public forum to address Luke or to address each other. Once eliminated from the show, the producers silenced them. While a very small number were quoted after the show aired, the majority was not heard from again. Their rejections were permanent with no chance of public explanation or chance to hold Luke responsible for his choices. Not only were their bodies disposable, their emotions were as well.

Green With Envy: Fat Girls are Emotional Train Wrecks or "The Money Shot"

This show's lifeblood were the tears of the women. The first episode gave us tears from each of the women as they bemoaned their lives and their singleness. The theme of fat holding them back from love was ever-present. Their fat is portrayed as the source of their lonely life. They are depicted discussing previous relationships where weight held them back or ended the relationships. Kristian discusses a relationship where a man gave her a gym membership. Danielle discusses her difficulty with going on a second date. During the prom preparation Kristian discussed how she didn't have a date to her prom

and had to get photos taken with her friend's date. The hardships of their fatness is a strong source of sadness in their life. The struggle to be loved for who they are, not their size is juxtaposed against their relationship with food. The undertones of this juxtaposition accuses the women of being responsible for their situation. If they loved themselves more than food, they would be loved. This tension between the desire for food and the desire for love and acceptance leads to many emotional moments with the women. When Luke's mother arrives at the house, Tali and Malissa discuss the importance of being able to cook in a way that is competitive. Lauren mentions repeatedly that the women who cannot cook need to go home. While food is never clearly blamed by the women as their reason for their sadness (it is usually the weight that is the focus, not the assumed cause of the weight), the editing could be said to be making this argument, providing the producers with their lifeblood of reality TV: drama or "the money shot." Dubrofsky defines the money shot in reality television as the moment when emotion overwhelms reason. For *More to Love*, that moment started when the show began and lasted the bulk of the series. The excess of emotions on the show seems indicative of the overall excess of the women. The women's emotions are extreme and seem to be mostly self-inflicted. The consumers in them do not get their emotions from arguments in most cases, but from demons they were fighting upon entering the house. The tears are about their every day life, their inability to find love, their lack of self-esteem. The "money shots" are provided not by external conflict, but internal. In the first episode, two women, Michelle and Natalia, were singled out as the purveyors of the "money shots" and were followed very closely until their time of departure in that

episode. Once they left, the producers focused that energy onto Mel B, Kristian, and Mandy (the two largest remaining girls and the smallest) who were slowly unraveling. The unraveling of Mel B and Kristian is depicted as the internal struggling overwhelming the moments while Mandy's "money shots" are shown as being caused by witnessed external moments (Luke kissing another girl or being picked on by the contestants.) No matter the cause, the emotions are shown to be excessive, like their bodies.

The money shot "shows a woman's emotions as spectacular and excessive, signaling that she is unable to control herself and therefore unfit for love.... At least one woman in every season provides the 'money shots.' This woman becomes the center of the narrative for several episodes until her elimination" (Dubrofsky, *Fallen Women in Reality TV* 355). Mel B gave us the most "money shots" and was a large part of the series' story as well as the second largest girl left after the first night's evictions. Mel B started the show crying and cried every episode she was on the show. She spoke of her insecurities, her belief that men asking her out were jokes and her unwillingness to date. On the good wife/bad wife episode, after yet another meltdown she admits that the emotions are a large part of why she doesn't date. As a fat woman, she has lived her life being insulted over her size. Being chosen as bad wife had her admitting she has never been judged on her character. As she explains to the confessional cam, she has always felt that her personality was what got her through. She never liked the outside packaging so she focused on the "inside gift." Having her personality questioned shook her to her core. The only place she felt any confidence was in her personality. Being told her personality was enough left her with nothing in which to have confidence. As her

confidence shattered, so did her control over her emotions. Her emotions give the show many “money shots” where her emotions overwhelm her.

As Mel B said farewell in the fourth episode, Kristian, the largest girl after the first night’s eviction as well as the only body visibly marked as non-white, had been brought to the front as a crazy lovelorn female. While Kristian’s race is never explicated nor could it be located on any of the sites about the show, she is clearly marked through the darker complexion as well as her slang use of phrases, such as “junk in the trunk.” Kristian fell in love early and was very vocal about her love. She seemed almost manical in her love. As Kristian and Luke began to form a relationship, Kristian fell into hero worship for the man who could love her for her. Certain moments in the confessional, Kristian gave off a *Fatal Attraction* vibe with her intensity, emotions and candor. She confesses her love within three days of meeting Luke. She begins to speak of Luke using worship tones. She fell in love immediately with Luke and within her love for him speaks of Luke in a way of possession. Kristian’s role as the strong victim is portrayed throughout the show as the one who will smile at you and then destroy you with questions or moments of honesty. While her race not acknowledged and therefore considered invisible, she is painted in the role of pawn of the white contestants. Her emotions are seen as more extreme, her feelings stronger and less controlled, her entire being is seen as extreme. Her performance of self is more than just an emotional fat girl, it is an emotional fat girl of color who appears to have no control. Her money shot moment of glory came as she was evicted from the mansion in episode five. As she is leaving she has a break from reality where her tears are overwhelming. Her emotions,

race, and body are all marked as excessive. As the largest girl left, her exit is the most dramatic. Luke chases her down to let her know that it wasn't because of her, but him that they wouldn't work. Her tears continue and *More to Love* has its money shot for the episode.

Mandy is brought forward in episode five, before we say farewell to Kristian, as another purveyor of the money shot of emotions. Up until her two-on-one date with Kristian and Luke, Mandy had been a background character who had gone on some group dates and kissed Luke in episode four. It is not until episode five that the audience is given a glimpse at the emotional lack of stability comes to the forefront. During her two-on-one date, Mandy is sent in for her one-on-one time with Luke while Luke is kissing Kristian. This sends Mandy into an emotional downward spiral. She locks herself in the ladies' restroom and sounds of crying are heard. As Luke chases after her, she confesses her insecurities and instability within the context of a show that allows the bachelor a harem from which to choose his partner. Her role on the show shifts at this point from a background player to a leading role of emotional wreck. As the show progresses from this point, Mandy is seen as weak by some of the other women when she is pushed to show more emotion. In episode seven, as she prepares for her first one-on-one date with Luke Malissa pushes Mandy to tears by asking about her relationship with Luke. As Malissa pushes Mandy's insecurities to the surface, Malissa is effectively bringing Mandy's doubts and fears to the forefront. During the date, Mandy's parents further this by saying they are not sure she is ready for a relationship. The purpose of these shows, as Kafka points out is to "uncover as a principal – that romantic choice is

demanded by the social gaze as proof of love – it then enacts perversely as a set of arbitrary choices whose only purpose is to turn affect into the spectacle of tears and rage.... The television screen can deliver affective knowledge through far more subtle means than the spectacle of emotion” (113). The spectacle of emotion is what Mandy, Kristian and Mel B provide during their time on the show.

The women, through their emotions, exhibit weakness and insecurities. While the show claims its goal is to show that the average woman can find love, it also shows the average woman as overly emotional, insecure in her body image, and driven by heteronormative desire. In other incarnations of reality competition dating shows, the majority of emotion shown is more anger-driven than tear-driven. Catty comments and arguments are the life blood of other dating shows. On *More to Love*, the emotions are sad and self-loathing. The money shot, on *More to Love*, were these moments of uncontrollable emotions:

Like the orgasmic cum shot of pornographic films, the money shot of talk shows makes visible the precise moment of letting go, of losing control, of surrendering to the body and its ‘animal’ emotions. It is the loss of the ‘civilized’ self that occurs when the body transcends social and cultural control, revealing human behavior in its ‘raw’ rather than its ‘cooked form.’ (Grindstaff 20)

The editing of the show offers a narrative that women who are larger are also weaker confirming what Young posits, “As long as thinness is valued more highly than fatness, and the negative connotations of fatness still exist, fat women will never be accepted as women, regardless of fat” (251-252). The acceptance as fat woman is an important one in a show where the goal is heteronormativity. The women must find a way to be seen as feminine to be accepted by the patriarchal figure in the bachelor Luke. Luke must feminize the women, must see them as feminine in order for them to be chosen. The

negative connotations of weakness, slovenly, self-loathing, and unworthiness are being shown in the representation of emotional breakdowns. As Bordo states, most approaches to body image “ignore the fact that for most people in our culture, slenderness is indeed equated with competence, self control and intelligence, and feminine curvaceousness with wide-eyed, giggly vapidness” (55). The portrayals of the women on this show are ones of need and emotion. With the exception of Mandy, Mel B and Kristian are two of the largest women on the series and the two largest who make it the farthest. The emotions shown by these two women are portrayed as the most pathetic in Mel B and unstable in Kristian. To be fat in this situation is portrayed as the most needy and most insecure of the women. Mandy offered what could possibly be argued as a more damaging narrative as she has the lowest BMI of all the contestants and is visually the one with the thinnest body. Her being on a show like *More to Love* is questionable as she is the thinnest woman, her portrayal of instability and insecurity could further the idea that to be stable and secure, one must be smaller than Mandy’s fitness instructor frame. Emotions are not just for the ones who are visibly fat, but also for the ones who perceive themselves as fat, even when evidence is to the contrary.

Blue v. Pink: Gender roles

As mentioned when discussing the disposability of the women’s bodies, the gendered performance of each woman played a rather large role in their future in the house and on the show. Luke starts the show saying he wants to find his Mrs. Conley. He repeatedly addresses his desire for more than a wife, a Mrs. Conley. The assumption can be made that he is looking for less of a partner and more of a traditional wife who

submits to her husband. As Carbaugh points out, the choice to take a man's name is often perceived as a sacrifice of independent identity. With the sacrifice of the independent identity, the women are able to start a better, truer and more rewarding life as a Mrs. As Luke wishes for a woman with confidence, he also seems to be wishing for a woman willing to sacrifice, more than compromise, for love and his last name.

Luke starts the show speaking of how he looks for a woman with confidence. He is very open about his desire for the traditional family. He speaks about his desire for children and as he gets closer to the women, he begins to quiz them on their desire for children. During the second week, Lauren notifies Luke that two of the women left have no desire for children. Arianne and Vanessa, the only two women left over the age of 30, are eliminated after Lauren expresses their desire to not have children as well as reminds Luke of their ages. These two women are shown having no desire for the traditional female role of mother and housewife.

Heather, an early front-runner, is eliminated after Luke asks her about children. She says she hasn't thought about them and isn't sure she wants to stay home and be a housewife. She states that she would like to keep working. When Luke asks about how they would handle their jobs as well as children, she is unsure. Her uncertainty on children and then her insecurities of Luke's relationships with the other girls seem to be the nails in her coffin on the show.

As we get down to the final four, Luke meets the families of the four remaining women. With the exception of Tali, all the relatives express concern about the women's commitment to a marriage and family. Anna's parents ask Luke how he would feel about

Anna traveling with her modeling career. Mandy's parents express concern about Mandy being mature enough for a long-term relationship. Malissa's sisters tell of how Malissa refuses to babysit her niece and doesn't seem comfortable around children. Tali's aunt and uncle express concerns on the other side of things. Their concerns are if Tali's family, due to the difference in religions, will accept Luke. The only woman whose ability to sustain a relationship and to rear children isn't questioned is Tali. The other women are either infantilized or painted as incapable of rearing children. At the end of the episode, Luke eliminates Anna. His only concern seems to be her career and where he fits into that. She appears to not want to sacrifice her career for family. The next episode sees Mandy leaving for what appears to be very little reason.

When Tali and Malissa meet Luke's dad, Luke's dad is very concerned about the religious difference between Tali and Luke as Tali is Jewish and Luke is Christian. Tali speaks very openly about her desire for children and rearing them to believe, which religion is not as important as that they believe. Malissa's religion is mentioned in passing, with Dad expressing how natural she would fit into the family as they have the same core beliefs. Tali appears to fulfill more of the traditional role as she is willing to give up her career and home to be with Luke, while Malissa is not as willing to sacrifice.

Religion as an intersection up to this point has barely made a blip on the radar. When Luke meets Tali's uncle who is also Christian, Tali's uncle talks openly with Luke about how religious Tali's family is and how he is not truly accepted, as he is not Jewish. Luke is forced to face a lacking in him with Tali. He and Tali discuss religion to acknowledge that it is there and something they must work through together. This is the

first time a true partnership is formed with a goal to face adversity. Luke's Christianity is normalized, while Tali is Othered in this narrative. The difficulty is not in Luke's Christianity, but in Tali's Judaism. Luke expresses no desire to convert and does not request Tali to convert. When Luke's father asks the questions of Tali about religion, Luke appears to defer to Tali to answer the questions. He supports all Tali says while never really speaking out to his dad. Luke's dad asserts his patriarchy on Luke by telling him his choice should be the Christian lady, Malissa. Luke bucks the patriarchic stance of his dad and defends Tali and their relationship. Malissa, in her Christian beliefs, appears more feminine as she is suitable and agreeing with Luke's dad. While Tali is not made to be masculine, she is seen as less worthy of Luke due to her religion.

Gendered performances are based on social norms regarding gender. As Tali is willing to make concessions and is perceived as more of a traditionalist, many of the other women are seen as more liberal and radical in their performance. Many times fat women are expected to be more masculine as they fulfill masculine expectations by taking up more space and being more of a presence. Traditionalism is the desired in this moment with hints of independence that can be sacrificed for the sake of the children.

Fatness, through feminist theory, is seen as yet another way to oppress women. As argued by feminist scholars (Bordo; LeBesco; Moon and Sedgwick) assigning a size for beauty and competency further oppresses the female form. As fairy tales teach that beauty is rewarded, ugliness should be punished (Zipes), this show attempts to celebrate the beauty of the curvy female form while only furthering the negative messages about size. Luke's expulsion of the largest women reinforces the message that thinner is still

prettier and more desirable. The number of women leaving discussing the shock that larger women were still on the show continues this rhetoric. Beauty continues to be defined through the lens of thinness. As Wolf so succinctly explains, “The beauty myth is not about women at all. It is about men’s institutions and institutional power” (13). Luke Conley and Mike Fliess, the executive producer, define beauty. While defining beauty they objectify from the moment the first episode starts with the images of the size 2 reality competition contestants to the last moment when Tali sends out her own version of Camryn Manheim’s Emmy acceptance speech “This is for all the fat girls.” The show sets up a pre-text of being a search for love and delivers to the audience an objectification of the eating habits, love for food, emotional insecurities, gendered performance and identity limitations afforded fat women. It could be celebrated as a trailblazing show, as a leveling of the reality TV playing field. It was not. After one eight-episode season, the show was not renewed. Fat women must continue to do it on their own in a world where fat is the newest evil to oppress and judge.

Chapter 6:
Love Through a Wide-Angle Lens: Discussion

But whether small or great, and no matter what the stage or grade of life, the calls rings up the curtain, always, on a mystery of transfiguration—a rite, or moment, spiritual passage, which, when complete, amounts to a dying and a birth. The familiar life horizon has been outgrown; the old concepts, ideals, and emotional patterns no longer fit; the time for the passing of a threshold is at hand. —Campbell

The child who dreams of being a Cinderella dreams perforce not only of being chosen and elevated by a prince, but also of being a glamorous sufferer or victim. What these stories convey is that women in distress are interesting. —Zipes

I am not afraid to throw my weight around pound by pound by pound
Because I'm Big, blond & beautiful face the fact it's simply irrefutable!
No one wants a meal that only offers the least when girl, we're serving up the whole
damn feast. —Big, Blonde and Beautiful from *Hairspray* (Shaiman)

I started this study looking for a way to justify my own quest for love as a fat woman. My identity is first and foremost a fat woman. All other identities are secondary, if acknowledged at all. My size is totalizing of my identity. Through this journey, I wanted to look at these women and how they navigate their identities throughout their journeys. I found that they are lost in how to be both fat and a woman. By woman, I mean a person who is able to be open and loving while also being strong and independent. In a show where dependence is key, the large women fell victim to this dependence. From the moment the show started until Tali and Luke close the show, fat was the only identity. As a dating show, the sex of the participants comes in to play as only a conduit for the fat forms to attempt to find acceptability in the eyes of each other and of the audience. Mike Fleiss, in his myth-creator role, exploited the size over all else in the show. It wasn't a love story; it was a story of fatness.

More to Love was a short run series with no current plans for renewal. While the show may have only lasted eight short weeks with a relatively small viewing audience, it has strong societal implications. The implications speak toward how women are portrayed and viewed in our current society. Whether it is Dove's campaign towards a multifaceted view on beauty or Oprah's quest for self-acceptance, the views on the female body are still being defined, classified and marginalized based on size.

More to Love was set up to expand the definition and classification of acceptability of size to include larger people. The marginalization of fatness increased as the show progressed. Nineteen women were evicted from the fairy tale and one, Tali, saw her fairy tale dream fulfilled with a happy-ever-after. Since the airing of the show, Luke

and Tali have fallen victim to the reality competition dating show curse and did not make it to the altar. They parted ways within three months of the show ending. The myth of love was again unsuccessful. In the end, the myth was denied for all twenty women and the bachelor. The viewing audience was allowed to believe the fairy tale comes true for fat people when they are confident, independent, attractive, and most importantly, chosen.

Luke Conley performed the hero of the fairy tale narrative with style and class. He was able to achieve his quest of slaying the dragons of the women's low self-esteem and boost their confidence. He was able to leave modern day life and take the audience on a journey of love. Through his dates with the women and elimination ceremonies, he led the audience to his love story with Tali. Each of the twenty women played a role in the success of Luke's quest. The women were stepping stones in Luke's quest. He offered the fairy tale, the myth of love, to each of the women with an expectation of acceptance for the whole person, not just the external. In the end, Luke reinforced the status quo.

Historically fat women on television were only seen in two ways, the mammy and the best friend. This show had the potential to explode the definition to include love interest. The show was set up to redefine the availability of love. The hero eliminated the largest women and found love with a smaller plus-size model. He would slay the dragon of low self-esteem and would then reject the women with no explanation. His power and control were ever-present. He was never held accountable for his actions.

The idea of fatness is totalizing in the body. This show furthered this totalizing with its editing to include mostly conversations of fatness and food. The women were

portrayed as being fat eating blobs over female bodies. Feminist theory offers a way of deconstructing the narrative afforded by the fairy tale of the show. The show offers a sloth-like view of the women from the very start of the opening sequence. They are not afforded any identity other than fatness from that moment until the final three episodes, when the women were narrowed down to the final four. They were the thinnest, youngest, most willing to procreate four. The oppression of the women is never ending. The availability of other intersections of identity is erased. The women are nothing more than fat bodies. Only when Tali brings out another identity of religion and nationality is she afforded a different identity, yet it is still a marginalized one. Her Judaism is Othered by Luke's Christianity.

The study found that the myth of love is offered in a limited fashion to the women as long as they fit into heteronormative expectations. To be afforded the narrative you must be young, thinner than those around you, willing to have children and ready to wed the prince. The larger the woman, the less acceptable you are for the myth. Beauty may not be a specific size, but it appears, based on this show, to be about being smaller than those around you. Beauty is being willing to procreate, to mother. The mammy and best friend must combine to be the perfect woman for the fairy tale in this narrative.

The women are powerless in their roles in the myth. Their role is to submit to the prince's choices and whims, while he is not held accountable to the women. He is the man. He has the power. He must choose. While he spoke of not wanting to hurt the women, he knew he had to and did so, as the show depicted, with no ownership in the decisions and implications of his decisions.

According to the feminist analysis, this show upholds the rhetoric of fat as less female. Fat women are oppressed women. Whether it is their performance of their relationships with food and their lack of self-control, or their excess of emotions, they appear out of control. They cannot stop themselves from excess. The excess makes them disposable. The disposability of their bodies demonstrates their unacceptability. With Luke having all the power, they must perform feminine in its most fundamental form. They must be docile, beautiful, fertile, and supportive of their man while never questioning his motives.

This show offered a text to understand how the fairy tale myth of love, fatness, and feminist ideals are in conversation with each other. The fairy tale cannot exist with the feminist paradigms of modern society for these women. Fatness requires traditionalism, as they are not given the independence of being acceptable women. When put in conversation, they do not compliment each other.

This research shows the abnormalizing and totalizing of fatness as an identity in women. The show's futile attempts to demonstrate that love is available to all no matter the size fail. Television producers need to realize the implications of the message, both intentional and unintentional, of their shows. Mike Fleiss set up the show with his bias of thin as beautiful in the interviews conducted before the show, while also expressing his hope to reach a larger audience. His attempt ended up reaching a much smaller audience and continuing the stereotypes and prejudices towards fat women. The implications of such a show are a continuing of the oppression and disposability of the fat female form.

Using one identity marker as the be-all, end-all of a person erases the true worth of the person.

More to Love failed in its attempts to make fatness acceptable in a love story.

Whether it is the fault of the producer, the bachelor or the cast of women is negligible, what isn't negligible is the proliferation of stereotypes of women who are fat. The constant reminders and discussions of food and self-loathing send messages to the audience of lack of acceptability. As this season *The Bachelor* is in full swing, the bachelor is the man who was considered the most hated bachelor of all time as he refused to choose between the two women. The series ratings are holding strong at 9.5 million viewers on average a week (Mitovich). This number is almost double what *More to Love* received during its season. The viewing audience is willing to watch a "most hated man" attempt to find love again with 25 thin single women than watch a group of "average" people attempt that same quest. Love does have a size according to what shows survive. Bikinis are sexier than a one piece. The viewing audience has spoken. Fat is unattractive, thin is beautiful. This mentality is holding strong. While I hold no dreams of one study changing a society's view on the female body, I hold hope that conversation will continue to grow and flourish around the need for a more accurate representation of women in the media. The increasing numbers of young people with eating disorders and negative self-image will one day level off and begin to drop. Mike Fleiss attempted what no other producer has tried, to afford the narrative of love to a group of fat women. The attempt is important; the attempt matters. While the result is not what was hoped, it did open up the genre, for a short time.

Implications and Contributions of the study

While *More to Love* did not make any real shifts in how fat women are viewed and was considered a failure by media standards, it offered a timely and relevant text to study how fatness is portrayed, read and communicated in current US American society. This study brought forth the into the conversation of fatness in communication the skewed and marginalizing the media does of people who are outside the ideal on body type and size. Fat advocates work tirelessly to open the minds of society to stop the totalizing of size on a person. Throughout this study, the spotlight has been shown on how the editing of *More to Love* portrayed the excess and desperation of fat women due to their size, and no other markers. The fairy tale of fat women should be one of love for self first. A call needs to be made throughout society for fat women to stand up and say they will not go into that lonely night, but come out of the closet of shame due to size. Within this study, fat women were spotlighted as incapable of control, in need of saving, and being one-dimensional in their three-dimensional bodies.

The female body is where the most contention with size exists. Feminist theory and intersectionality need to look further into how size plays into identity. This study only scratched the surface of the implications of what intersectionality means within the fat female form. By putting feminist theory and intersectionality in conversation with the mythic narrative of love, this analysis has brought to the forefront the flaws in how we look at and talk about the fat female form. Reality television is exploiting not just fat women, but all women and their bodies. Competition dating shows are offering a skewed view of the fairy tale quest of love. Through the lens of the fairy tale myth, this series

demonstrated the twisted power structure in play within heteronormativity. The female body is under the control and disposability of the male.

The implications of this research have the potential to be far-reaching. Through media studies, the conversation needs to work to include fat scholarship and what media is saying about body size. As mentioned in the literature review on fatness, a large number of elementary school aged children are dissatisfied with their bodies. This dissatisfaction stems in part from the media. Reality television claims to use real people. When real people are proliferating the fat-hate speech, it amplifies all the anti-fat speech. Media scholars need to include size in the spotlight on the narratives being told and the people who are being oppressed within the narratives.

In Communication Studies, this study contributes to existing conversations surrounding feminism and mythic narrative. Feminist theory and the body have walked hand-in-hand for a little while and fatness has been in the relationship, yet not to the extent that it has a starring role. Fatness and feminism need to form a stronger bond in the study of communication. The analysis of this show only offers a limited view of how the two should work together to bring about a change in how the female body is discussed. Acceptance of the female body in any shape or color has been the main goal of this research and needs to rise in the conversation surrounding what it means to be attractive as a woman.

As the conversation of attractiveness grows, the idea of love will also grow. The mythic fairy tale of love sells heteronormativity with such expertise and power that it does not allow any other narrative to exist. The fat women on *More to Love* wanted the

fairy tale, while their bodies are not included in the heteronormative narrative. Their presence in the narrative queers the fairy tale, and it is a queering that needs to be expanded. The fat female body challenges heteronormativity within the mythic narrative. Studying the mythic narrative in conjunction with the fat body opens up the implications of queerness on romantic love.

Using the critical interpretive method, through the hermeneutic of myth and fairy tales, offers the possibility for the research presented here to further the growing body of research on myths and feminism. The fat body is a contested site, and as such, is the perfect location to further research on mythic narratives, reality television and feminism.

Concluding thoughts

Fatness in reality television has been seen prior to *More to Love*. On Fox's *Average Joe*, a few of the average looking men were overweight or obese. They were kept on for one week and then sent home, as Kavka argues, to show the bachelorette had an open mind regarding "anyone marked as 'handicapped'" (116-117). Later in the same series, the bachelorette donned a fat suit and eliminated the man who made the most negative remarks about the fat woman. As shown on *Average Joe*, fatness is seen as handicapped. The least handicapped were kept the longest on the show. Intersectionality is usually seen as a race or sexual orientation theory, as those identities are so heavily judged, minimized and marginalized. In the current American society, with its obsession with health and body image, fatness is becoming an equally polarizing identity. As Wolf expresses:

During the past decade, women breached the power structure; meanwhile, eating disorders rose exponentially and cosmetic surgery became the fastest-growing

medical specialty. During the past five years, consumer spending doubled, pornography became the man media category, ahead of legitimate films and records combined, and thirty-three thousand American women told researchers that they would rather lose ten to fifteen pounds than achieve any other goal.(10)

The beauty myth proliferates the power of the marker of body size as beginning to overpower other identity markers. Thin is ideal. In 2009, media markets were brought to new heights of viewership with shows focusing on fatness. *The Biggest Loser* took over the top Tuesday night spot of *American Idol*. Viewing fatness as something from which people need to be saved is leading in ratings, while shows that focus on fat as acceptable and worthy of love are being criticized. Fat acceptance is as unacceptable today as being gay was ten years ago when Ellen DeGeneres came out on her sitcom, or 40 years ago, when an interracial kiss appeared on *Star Trek* for the first time on television.

Society seems to be starting to speak out against the oppression of size. *More to Love* was a decent start to opening up the myth of love to include people of size. The oppression of size may be changing as I write this. When I began this journey, I was focusing on the implications of fatness on love and the female body as seen on television. Yet, as the journey progressed, I began to notice more and more voices speaking out against prejudice based on size. As mentioned in Chapter one, many spoke out against the removal of the Lane Bryant Cacique ad from the family hour of television during *American Idol*. In October of 2010, Marie Claire blogger Maura Kelly brought forth a new windstorm of support for fatness on television in her critique of the situation comedy *Mike and Molly* by stating “I think I’d be grossed out if I had to watch two characters with rolls and rolls of fat kissing each other ... because I’d be grossed out if I had to watch them doing anything” (www.marieclaire.com). She goes on to claim that weight is

something that can be controlled and even offers tips on how to lose the offensive weight. This blog has 4042 (as of January 10, 2011) comments mostly in attack of the author for her insensitive comments and sizist attitude. After the windfall, she posted an apology stating, “I would really like to apologize for the insensitive things I’ve said in this post. Believe it or not, I never wanted anyone to feel bullied or ashamed after reading this, and I sorely regret that it upset people so much. A lot of what I said was unnecessary. It wasn’t productive, either” (www.marieclaire.com). Ms. Kelly was attacked on shows like *The View* and *The Talk* for her comments and threats of cancelling subscriptions were heard throughout the comments and on other pro-fat sites. Ms. Kelly had the courage to say what many think about fat bodies and was harshly criticized. Her comments were cruel and thoughtless; yet shine a light on the prejudice that exists around weight. Her brief analysis of the show *Mike and Molly* is offensive and honest. A spotlight is shown on one woman’s words while MTV airs *I Used to be Fat* about college girls who want to lose weight and go through a 90 day extensive training program to lose the weight and A&E brings forth yet another show, titled *Heavy*, on the offensiveness of weight and the need to expunge it from the body by following two people an episode as they struggle with their weight. *Biggest Loser* is in its 11th season with its reported “largest cast yet” and most weight loss. Ms. Kelly became a poster child for sizism in a society that glorifies her attitude allowing for the ratings on the shows to maintain so the shows continue. Luckily, *Mike and Molly* and *Drop Dead Diva* have been renewed for more episodes so positive images of fatness will continue being seen on television.

Television is attempting to make strides to better understand that fatness is not the inherent evil it is rumored to be. Until that time when fat is not the totalizing identifier, the fat fight must continue. Beauty definitions need to be changed. Young children need to know that they are acceptable without obsessing over how they look. *More to Love* was a failed attempt at changing these definitions and opening up the ideas of love to all sizes. I still hold on to hope that the rhetoric around fatness will turn from unacceptability and unworthiness to one of a celebration of differences.

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Appendix A: More to Love Statistics

Name	Age	Height	Weight	BMI	BMI rating	Eliminated	1st kiss	Careers	City
Luke	26	6'3"	330	41.2	Obese			Real Estate Investor	Santa Maria, CA
Tali	26	5'4"	190	32.6	Obese	WINNER	5th	Artist/Motivational Speaker	New York, NY/Aurora, CO/Israel
Malissa	26	5'4"	170	29.2	Overweight	8th-runner up	1st	Waitress	Los Angeles, CA
Mandy	25	5'7"	180	28.2	Overweight	7th	4th	Fitness/Dance Instructor	Long Beach, CA
Anna	27	6'2"	230	29.5	Overweight	6th	1st	Plus Size Model	Los Angeles/San Francisco, CA
Heather	22	5'5"	200	33.3	Obese	5th	3rd	Cocktail waitress	Ankeny, IO
Kristian	26	5'5"	225	37.4	Obese	5th	3rd	Teacher	Wallington, NJ
Lauren	26	5'9"	210	31	Obese	4th	2nd	Event Planner	Atlanta, GA
Mel B	21	5'6"	220	35.5	Obese	4th	2nd	Nanny	Beverly Hills, CA/Baton Rouge, LA
Christina	23	5'6"	206	33.2	Obese	3rd	2nd	Student	Brighton, MI
Bonnie	26	5'11"	215	30	Obese-borderline	3rd		0 Make up Artist	Portland, OR
Amanda	22	5'10"	235	33.7	Obese	3rd		0 College Student	Los Angeles, CA
Danielle	25	5'9"	195	28.8	Overweight	3rd		0 Receptionist	Los Angeles, CA
Vanessa	32	5'8"	194	29.5	Overweight	2nd		0 Criminal Defense Attorney	Los Angeles, CA
Arianne	37	5'10"	190	27.3	Overweight	2nd		0 Entertainer	Santa Monica, CA/Kansas City, MO
Makali	24	5'7"	193	30.2	Obese-borderline	2nd		0 Teacher	Los Angeles, CA
Michelle	32	5'5"	230	38.3	Obese	1st		0 Photographer	Orange County, CA
Natasha	25	5'9"	197	29.1	Overweight	1st		0 Rocket Scientist	Los Angeles, CA
Sandy	30	5'8"	200	30.4	Obese-borderline	1st		0 Dancer	New York, NY
Shari	34	5'4"	180	30.9	Obese	1st		0 Corporate Trainer	Los Angeles, CA
Natalia	28	5'10"	279	40	Obese	1st		0 Make up Artist	Dallas, TX